

Hungering For Righteousness

Matthew 5:6

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on March 7, 2009

Introduction

We have come to the fourth beatitude, which gets to the motivating, driving passion behind these beatitudes - it's hungering and thirsting after righteousness. This is the "want-to" of the beatitudes. How do you get people to want to do the right thing? For sure you can't skip over the first three rungs of the ladder, but neither can you climb into the next four beatitudes if God's Spirit has not been working in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.

But this willingness and hunger is amazing, because though all humans have dozens of hungers, they do not naturally hunger and thirst after righteousness. But once grace invades the heart, God gives a new hunger. And it's a hunger that should keep growing over life - it doesn't always, but it should. When we get this passion for righteousness it gradually erodes our former passions and replaces them. Charles Spurgeon, the famous Reformed Baptist pastor, once said of this beatitude:

He is blessed because in the presence of this hunger many meaner hungers die out. One master passion, like Aaron's rod, swallows up all the rest. He hungers and thirsts after righteousness, and therefore he is done with the craving of lust, the greed of avarice, the passion of hate, and pining of ambition. (Volume 35, p. 487)

So this is a key motive that will take us to maturity and victory. Let's look at these beatitudes through the lens of sports, since we've just come off of the Olympics. Beatitude #1 is a would-be skater who is so poor that she hasn't even been on an ice rink yet. She cannot afford the training, yet she comes to a master coach and asks the coach to take her on, to pay her way, to give her talent to skate, to then train her in that talent, and even to buy the skates and clothing. That's what spiritual bankruptcy is like. You can't offer anything. And amazingly, God does exactly that at the beginning of our Christian walk. He even gives us the ability to get past the pride and the humiliation to make this audacious request. So He not only gives the poverty, but he gives us the willingness to come in faith. And when we come in faith, God instantly says, "Yes," and gives us the kingdom of heaven with all of its resources.

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Beatitude #2 is a willingness for the skater to be corrected and to change. It's a willingness to hate the bad habits enough to put them off.

Beatitude #3 is a willingness to submit oneself daily to the training of the master coach and to do what he says without questioning. Some of us skaters think we know better than God, and we are trying to skip beatitude #3. But that beatitude deals with a willingness to trust the coach, no matter what he says. This meekness is an utter yieldedness to God.

Beatitude #4 is the desire or passion to persevere in the Christian life. OK? It's the want-to of skating. It's the motivation that keeps the skater going despite numerous falls.

These four beatitudes frame the inward disposition that is absolutely essential if we are to have success in the next four beatitudes that deal with the actual actions of righteousness. If you don't have the want-to of skating, you won't be willing to take the hard falls, do the hard practices, and devote your life to skating. It just won't be worth it. In the same way, if you don't have the want-to, you won't have what it takes to be merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, or to live so righteously that it guarantees opposition and competition (those are the last four beatitudes that deal with inward and outward and even social righteousness). It takes hunger to get filled.

Now in one sense that is an inadequate illustration, because Scripture portrays our hearts as more like a wild stallion that God is taming. And as this taming process begins, there may be initial fighting against the master. In other words, there may be a lack of want-to. (That's why it is the fourth beatitude, right?) But the more time this young stallion spends with the master, the more he grows fond of the master's goodness, and the more he wants to be like the master. God instills in his heart a deep, deep desire to be more like God.

Both illustrations have weaknesses, but both show a growing want-to that this beatitude is all about. So let's take this beatitude apart and see if we can understand it.

I. Happiness Is ...

The first thing that we see in this beatitude is that happiness is bound up with our pursuit of righteous living. This must have surprised his hearers. They had seen the Pharisees brand of righteousness and the Pharisees sure didn't seem too happy. There seemed to be no touch of happiness in their lives whatsoever. In fact, one of the frustrations of the Pharisees was that they could hardly get anybody to imitate their lifestyle.

History tells us that very few actually tried to live like a Pharisee. It was tough. It was no fun. The people of that day, just like the people of today equate holiness with misery. And it is because they have a wrong view of what righteousness is all about.

A. No True Happiness Without True Righteousness

1. Not Self-Righteousness (Matt. 5:20; 23:25-26; Rom. 3:10; 7:18; Phil 3:9; Tit. 3:5)

In Matthew 5:20 Christ said, **“For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.** He is saying, “That’s not the kind of righteousness that’s going to bring happiness and fulfillment. Their righteousness doesn’t cut it.” And when He said that, He was saying that it wasn’t possible for *any* human righteousness to make it. If the Pharisees couldn’t make it, who could? They were the cream of the nitpickers. And yet in the Sermon on the Mount Christ proceeds to absolutely devastate them. They claimed to be pure in the sexual relations department and Christ uncovered all the harlotry that was in their hearts. They didn’t see their inward sin, and so they didn’t hunger after righteousness. They thought they had arrived. They claimed to have kept the sixth commandment and Christ said that they were guilty of murder in their hearts.

But He didn’t just criticize them for lacking inward depth in their righteousness, but also for lacking outward breadth. He showed several ways in which they actually broke the law outwardly. He said that they made void the law of God with their man-made traditions. And so He absolutely demolished their pretensions at righteousness. That’s why they wanted to kill Him. He was an embarrassment. He had been illustrating the truth of Romans 3:10, **“there is none righteous, no not one...”**

Now Scripture doesn’t deny that people can do good things in an outward way, but it denies that they are acceptable before God, because God sees the mixed motives; He sees the faulty goals that we have. He sees inside, and he told the Pharisees. **“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also.”** (Matt 23:25-26) And he brought people to the place where they could say with Paul, **“for I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells”** (Rom. 7:18). Paul did not find happiness in *producing*

righteousness; there's no fun in pumping at a dry well. He found his happiness in *receiving* righteousness from God. Philippians 3:9 says, "**and [that I may] be found in Him, not having my own righteousness ... but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection...**" It is in pursuing God, and in receiving His righteousness that we find this happiness. That's why we are hungering for it, and thirsting for it. We don't have it in ourselves. It's something that's got to come from outside.

2. But Imputed Righteousness In Justification (Rom. 4:3-6; see also 3:21; 5:18-19; 1 Cor. 1:30; Gal. 3:6,9; Jer. 23:7; Is. 45:8; 46:12,13; 51:5; 56:1; 61:10; Rom. 4:3)

In your outlines I have listed two kinds of righteousness that God gives to us. The first is the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ. The second is the imparted righteousness of Christ. In Christ's exposition of this beatitude in Matthew 6 He is primarily talking about an imparted righteousness because he is primarily dealing with believers. But let me quickly deal with the imputed righteousness, because that is where we start the Christian life, and that is the security we have for the rest of our life.

Imputation is simply an accountant's term. It means entered into the ledger and put to my account. It is a legal transaction. When I cash a check and put it into my bank account, the accountant doesn't look at the check and say, "Now wait a minute! Phil Kayser can't spend this money because the check has Dominion Covenant Church's name on it." No, they see that DCC made out the check to me, so they make a transfer and they credit to my account money from DCC's account. Well, the Scriptures in your outline indicate that when we place our faith in Christ - when we trust Christ enough to cash the check, God credits all the righteousness that Christ ever lived to our account and from that moment on treats us as being as righteous as Christ was. Isn't that incredible? That is one way that our righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. It's perfect righteousness; it's Christ's righteousness. That's why He can call every believer a saint. Romans 4:3 says, "**Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.**" It was accounted.

3. And Imparted Righteousness In Sanctification (Acts 10:35; Gal. 3:3; Rom. 6:13,16-20; Phil. 1:11; Heb. 11:33; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:14; 1 John 2:29; 3:7,10)

But there is a second way in which our righteousness is to exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, and that is that we are to hunger for an *imparted* righteousness. This one is not a legal transaction where we are treated just as if we had never sinned, and just as if we were perfectly righteous. This one is an actual enjoyment of the riches, not just in the ledger books, but also now in my heart and in my life. 1 John 3:7 says, **“Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.”** Some people try to make a rigid distinction between righteousness and holiness as if righteousness always deals with imputation and holiness with impartation, but you won’t find that distinction in the Bible. Holiness means to be set apart from the world to God, and righteousness means to be right with the law. Notice that he said, **“He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.”** In other words, if you have imputed righteousness, then you are also going to be practicing righteousness. Another way of saying it is that if you are justified, you are also going to be sanctified. The two go hand in hand. Justification immediately leads to sanctification, or another way of phrasing it is that salvation immediately leads to growth in holiness. There will be a change of life.

1John 3:10 says, **“In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God.”** The first practice of righteousness is mourning over our sins (beatitude 2). The next practice of righteousness is submitting ourselves to God’s discipline, training, and taming of our hearts (beatitude 3). And each beatitude after this is a continuation of that righteousness. But since we never arrive perfectly on earth, there will always be a hungering for more; there will always be a pressing into the upward calling in Christ Jesus. And the more we grow, the more we are going to be hungering to be more like Jesus.

So once again you can see that it all flows from a realization that we are poor (beatitude 1). If you are poor, everything you get has to be from outside – that includes spiritual hunger. Hebrews 11:33 speaks of people working righteousness by faith. And the reason it is by faith is because I am not to live the Christian life in my own strength. Unlike the Pharisees who had a self-righteousness, I am to look to the *Lord* in faith for *His* righteousness and for *His* strength to live my daily life. The sad thing is that many Christians don’t do this. They get saved by faith and then they stop

living by faith. Galatians 3:3 says, “**Are you so foolish, having begun in the Spirit are you now made mature by the flesh?**” Many Christians miss this point and they fail to experience the happiness of holiness because they are trying to be made mature by the power of the flesh. You cannot do it. They are trying to live the Christian life like the Pharisees did. And as a result they have dryness in their life; they have discouragement and their righteousness leads to spiritual misery. Galatians 3:5 goes on to describe doing miracles and asks, “**Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?**” Obviously our flesh can’t do a miracle. But his point is that everything we do that counts for eternity must be done by faith.

It is only an *imparted* righteousness that comes from *God* that can bring the kind of happiness in kingdom living that Christ speaks of. Everything else is a counterfeit. That’s why we hunger and thirst for true righteousness. We can’t manufacture our own righteousness. Just as our body needs physical food from outside to receive strength, our soul needs to look outside of itself to God for daily righteousness. And that is why so much of Christ’s exposition of this beatitude deals with prayer. Righteousness for the Christian is a daily work of God’s grace. If you aren’t in prayer continually, you aren’t hungering and thirsting for something outside of yourself. And we are going to be giving some practical applications of this in a moment.

B. No True Happiness Without True Filling (John 14:23; see also Psalm 42; 63; 84; 143:6; Is. 55; Jer. 2:13; Luke 11:13; Gal. 5:22-25; Eph. 5:18)

But I want you to notice that Christ not only says that true happiness is found in true righteousness, but true happiness is found in true filling. That’s the last part of the beatitude. It says, “...**for they shall be filled.**” Just as there is counterfeit righteousness, there is counterfeit filling. And many times we as Christians are satisfied with far less than what God is willing to fill us with. We want to be filled with happiness. But that is not what Christ is promising.

Happiness is the by-product of the filling, not the filling itself. And unfortunately, many times we are satisfied when we are filled momentarily with a temporal happiness, a wonderful experience that charges us up for the rest of the day, or with a blessing from God, or with an incredible seminar. But you know, the Psalms that form the background for this beatitude speak of hungering and thirsting for *more of God*. David is satisfied with nothing less than the closeness of God; the filling of God. He says, “**My soul pants**

for **You O God.**” Psalm 63 says, “**O God, You are my God; early will I seek You; my soul thirsts for You; my flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water. So I have looked for You in the sanctuary, to see Your power and Your glory.**”

If God is the only one who can give the kind of righteousness that we thirst for, then we will be satisfied with nothing less than a close encounter with God *Himself*, right? John 14:23 says, “**If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with Him.**” What an incredible promise – we will be filled with God Himself! Ephesians 5 tells us that the only way to have fulfillment in our marriage, in our workplace and in the rest of life is as we are continually being filled with the Holy Spirit. Grammatically, the command to be filled with the Spirit in verse 18 is the means for singing with grace in our hearts; is the means for wives and husbands living as they ought to live, and children and parents, and masters and slaves. So Ephesians 5 says that we can daily be filled with righteous living, but it is only as we are filled with the Holy Spirit. So if you long for righteousness; if you hunger and thirst after righteousness, you need the filling of the Holy Spirit to achieve it. If we are filled with anything less than God Himself, then we will miss out on both the righteousness and the happiness that Christ talks about.

II. Counterfeits to this beatitude

A. Counterfeit hungers and thirsts

1. More obvious false cravings and fillings

a) Craving to feel good (“the lust of the flesh”)

And yet Satan will try to fill our heart with anything and everything except for God. So we are going to take a little bit of time to look at the counterfeits. 1 John 2:16 summarizes the most obvious hungers for filling when it speaks of “**the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.**”

The lust of the flesh can really apply to anything that makes our bodies feel good. It can be craving for chocolate, nicotine, sex, food, drink, sleep, dopamine highs, or a soft mattress. Anything good can become an idol that we crave and try to be filled with.

b) Craving to own more (“the lust of the eyes”)

The lust of the eyes is a desire to have everything that we see, even if it belongs to our neighbor. It can overlap with the craving to feel good, because when we see a brownie, then our body wants it too. But this is more often related to wanting that new car, new bike, that new hunting rifle, or new dishwasher. And after we buy it, we temporarily feel better. But it is a constant search to be filled.

c) Craving for advancement (“the pride of life”)

The pride of life is a craving for advancement that will elevate us in the eyes of men. It could be advancement at work, at home, or at church. It could be advancement by way of praise, or advancement by way of knowledge, or by way of finances. But I think we all recognize the grosser forms of these three cravings.

2. More subtle false cravings

a) Hungering for man’s approval (Col. 3:22; Gal. 1:10)

What we often don’t recognize are the more refined versions of these counterfeit cravings and counterfeit fillings. For example, hungering for man’s approval can lead people to do all kinds of righteous deeds. Hungering for a boss’s approval will make some employees work very hard and get promoted. But Paul told the Colossians to serve their masters, “**not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God.**” Being a men-pleaser will eventually let you down. And it will certainly deprive you of God’s filling. Galatians 1:10 says, “**If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ**” (ESV).

A person might go to church so that his wife doesn’t think poorly of him, or because his parents expect it. She might go to prayer meeting so that her friends will think that she is a mature Christian. Why does she persevere in doing that? Well, *what they think happens to be important to her*. And sometimes we don’t even know our own hearts motivation on some of these more subtle reasons for why we engage in righteous things. God put into our hearts this need for approval, but he wanted our satisfaction for approval to find its fulfillment in Him. Instead, we crave peer approval, work approval, societal approval, and the approval of our families. But if you recognize the hunger to be a twisted form of our hunger for God, you will begin to be able to train it to be satisfied in God’s “Well done!”

b) Hungering to belong (John 9:22)

The same is true of the hunger to belong. God put that within our hearts. But if we love any human more than God, then our belonging to them will mean more than our belonging to God. In John 9:22 the desire to belong kept a Jew from following Jesus. But even in believers' lives, this hunger to belong can lower the degree to which we hunger and thirst after righteousness.

c) Hungering for the crown of righteousness (heaven) rather than the way of righteousness (Numb 23:10 versus 1 Pet 2:7)

Another subtle counterfeit is a hungering for *heaven*, but not a hungering for *righteousness itself*. Paul condemns these people for wanting to escape from the punishment of sin, but not from the sin itself. Thomas Watson words it that they hunger for the *crown* of righteousness, but not for the *way* of righteousness. This is so vividly illustrated in Balaam's fear of death. Balaam's testimony sounded pretty good when he said, "**Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my end be like his!**" Why did he want that? Because he saw the way believers face death with confidence and peace, and he didn't have that. He didn't want to go to hell. He didn't want to die in fear. He hungered for heaven, but he loved the wages of sin too much to hunger after righteousness. Contrast that with 1Peter 2:7, which says, "**To you who believe, He is precious.**" Hungering for heaven can be a counterfeit that replaces hungering for God.

d) Hungering for happiness rather than righteousness (Ezek. 33:30-33; Matt 13:20-21; Prov. 29:18; 16:20; 2Cor. 13:5; Ps 36:8)

Of course, hungering for happiness is another counterfeit that can actually replace hungering after righteousness. Turn with me to Ezekiel 33. This is a passage where Ezekiel had gotten excited about the apparent revival that was taking place in his church. And people loved coming to hear him, and they talked about the church and the preaching a lot. But God said it was a counterfeit. It was not a true hunger after righteousness. Let's begin reading at verse 30.

Ezekiel 33:30 ¶ "As for you, son of man, the children of your people are talking about you beside the walls and in the doors of the houses; and they speak to one another, everyone saying to his brother, 'Please come and hear what the word is that comes from the LORD.'

Ezekiel 33:31 So they come to you as people do, they sit before you as My people, and they hear your words, but they do not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, *but* their hearts pursue their *own* gain.

Ezekiel 33:32 Indeed you *are* to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they do not do them.

Ezekiel 33:33 And when this comes to pass—surely it will come—then they will know that a prophet has been among them.”

I want you to notice how subtle this counterfeit is. They act just like God’s people should act – delighting in church and delighting in the Scriptures being preached. It made them happy. In fact, he says that they were so happy about the preaching and the church that he compared it to the happiness they had when they went to the best of the music concerts of that day. Yet God said that they were not interested in doing God’s will. In some strange way it was just their own gain and their own happiness that they were pursuing. In contrast, Proverbs 29:18 says, “**But happy is he who keeps the law.**” And Proverbs 16:20 says, “**He who heeds the word wisely will find good, and whoever trusts in the LORD, happy is he.**”

Jesus warned us in the Parable of the Sowers that it was possible to have great joy in the *Gospel* and not even be a true believer. Matthew 13:20-21 is one of the scariest parts of the parable of the sower. Here is Christ’s description: “**But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.**” It is possible for you to experience much joy in church, and yet for it to be a counterfeit joy. Proof of the fact that you are following God is not the presence of joy; *it is a hungering and thirsting after righteousness.* 2Corinthians 13:5 says, “**Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified.**” We are doing a spiritual check up here not to make you miserable, but to make sure you have true happiness, not a counterfeit happiness. And true happiness can be incredibly deep. Psalm 36:8 says, “**They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house, and You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures.**” Not just a trickle of pleasures, but God’s river of pleasures. May we find pleasure and happiness in Him as we pursue *His* righteousness.

e) Hungering conditionally (Matt 19:16-30 vs Job 1:21; 2:9-10)

There is a fifth counterfeit that we need to look at – hungering conditionally. I think that the rich young ruler wanted a conditional hungering. He had been pursuing righteousness his whole life, but the moment Jesus put his finger on his idol (his possessions), he walked away. He had a conditional hunger. In contrast, Job worshipped God no matter what God took away. Now keep in mind that we are not pursuing righteousness in order to get saved. We will be seeing in Christ's exposition that He is dealing with people who are already saved. Remember, we start with beatitude #1 and possess the kingdom of heaven the moment we come to God as a beggar. This has nothing to do with getting saved. This has to do with the contrast between a false hungering that is not filled with God versus an unconditional hunger that finds itself filled and overflowing with God and God's joy.

f) Hungering half-heartedly (Matt 11:12; Is. 26:9; Jer. 2:13)

Where point e is holding out in one or more areas of life and telling God, "Hands off! I am not giving you this area of my life!", point f is a hungering that is half-hearted and lazy, and content for long seasons to avoid righteousness. Jesus said, "**the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force**" (Matt 11:12). God puts within the heart of a true believer such a strong desire for the kingdom and kingdom righteousness that nothing can come in between.

We could list many other counterfeits, but it is enough to point out that they exist. And all of these cravings are like little demons that grab you by the hands and keep you back from the one good craving that will find true satisfaction in God. C. S. Lewis once said,

Our Lord finds our desires not too strong but too weak. We are like half-hearted creatures who fool about with sex and drink and ambition when infinite joy is offered us. We are like children who would rather go on making mud-pies in a slum because we cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are too easily pleased.

Blaise Pascal said,

What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace? This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him...though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God himself.

Jeremiah summarizes all of this by saying, “**For My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns – broken cisterns that can hold no water**” (Jer. 2:13).

B. What if I sense my own weakness?

If the Spirit of God is awakening your heart to realize that you don’t have the true hunger of grace, do not ignore Him. Do not resist the Holy Spirit. Let Him lead you by the hand back to step 2 of mourning, and perhaps even to step 1 of asking. Or if you are worried because you sense the weakness of your hunger, there are three encouragements that I want to give to you:

1. A weak pulse still shows life (Matt 12:20; see Mark 9:24). Go to God by faith. (Beatitude #1)

First, you may have a weak pulse, but a weak pulse at least shows life. If you grieve that you don’t hunger as much as you would like, that is a good sign. It at least shows that you are a child of God at step number 2 on this ladder. But even if you don’t grieve, but wish you did, you can once again go as a poor man and declare to God, “Lord, I hate the fact that I hunger for the wrong things. Please, give me your blessed hunger. Help me to hunger after righteousness.” And if you do, God is not going to turn you away. One thing that I can guarantee you is that “**A bruised reed He will not break**” (Matt 12:20). You may feel bent over, ready to break, and not very holy, but let that take you back to the first beatitude and receive this hunger by faith. It will come.

2. Avoid things that hinder appetite (1Jn 2:15). (Beatitude #2)

Second, avoid things that tend to hinder appetites. This is beatitude #2. You’ve got to put off the spiritual junk food in between meals. You know what things that drag you down and make you lose your appetite for the Word, and for prayer, and for righteous living. You know what they are. Put them off. Do not allow anything to come between you and God’s filling. 1John 2:15 says, “**Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.**” You can’t experience the sweetness of God’s love and fellowship when you are clinging to the world. Make it your heart’s passion to be filled with God.

3. Work up an appetite through exercise (1Tim. 4:7; Heb. 3:13). (Beatitude #3)

Third, work up an appetite for righteousness through exercise. This is going back to beatitude #3 and saying to your Coach, I need some training again. When I do a good workout before breakfast, it gives me an appetite for food. 1Timothy 4:7 tells us, “**exercise yourself toward godliness.**” And there are many exercises you can engage in. Hebrews 3:13 tells us to exhort one another. Accountability, conversation, Bible Studies, hanging out together, and fellowship all take time, but they are spiritual exercises that can get your juices going and renew your appetite for the things of God. Other exercises are Bible reading, fasting and prayer, going to church, and teaching your family.

III. Christ’s medical advice for lack of appetite (Matthew 6:5-18)

In fact, let’s go ahead and look at Christ’s explanation in Matthew 6:5-18; and we will end with this. These verses are Christ’s medical advice for a loss of appetite. What kinds of things get that appetite for righteousness really going? This is Christ’s exposition on this beatitude. Please turn to Matthew 6. And we will begin reading at verse 5.

A. Who do you go to for filling? (Matt 6:5-6; Jn 14:20-23)

Matthew 6:5 “And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.

If you are praying so that others are pleased, you are taking the wrong medicine. You will be filled, but it will be the wrong filling. And I think a lot of Christians take this wrong medicine. What are you hungering for? What is your reward? Is it to have others think well of you? Is it to impress? Is it to fit in? Is it to be accepted by your peers as being a good guy? Is it to receive the praise and acceptance of men? That will let you down. But in verse 6 Jesus describes a kind of medicine that will cause this spiritual hunger to keep growing.

Matthew 6:6 But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who *is* in the secret *place*; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

He is saying that when you begin aggressively pursuing intimacy with the Father, or what John Owen speaks of as Communion with God, your heart *will* start hungering for the right things. It will be automatic. You won’t have to try to hunger. It will come. He is not saying that public prayer is

wrong. Public prayer is commanded. But what he is saying is that if you want this hunger for righteousness to grow, you have got to take the time to find intimacy with Him. Listen to what Jesus said in John 14:

John 14:20 At that day you will know that I *am* in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.

We are talking here about the deepest fellowship possible with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The kind of union that Jesus has with His Father, Jesus wants for us. In the next verse He says,

John 14:21 He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.”

To “manifest” means to have a tangible experience of His presence with you. It is such an overwhelming experience, that once you taste of it, you keep wanting more and more of God to fill you. So let me read that again, beginning at verse 21:

John 14:21 He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.”

John 14:22 Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, “Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?”

John 14:23 Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.

If your master passion in life is this beatitude, you will go to the source of righteousness over and over to be fed and to be filled. And you will never be disappointed.

B. Do you treat life like a magic formula – do this and you get this result? Or do you have a relationship with God? (Matt. 6:7; Ps. 42:1-2; 63:1)

Verse 7 gives us another false medicine that people use to get closer to God.

Matthew 6:7 And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.

Saying 100 Hail Mary’s (which is actually blasphemy to pray to Mary and treat her as God), or even saying the Lord’s Prayer a hundred times will not gain us this filling. In fact, that is an attempt to manipulate God. God wants a relationship, not a mindless formula. And the hunger David expresses in so many Psalms is a hunger for God, because he knows that God alone is the source of both righteousness and satisfaction.

C. Do you pattern your life after others or after God? (Matt 6:8a)

Verse 8 gives another false medicine, “**Therefore do not be like them...**” Too much of Christianity is trying to be like others, rather than trying to be like God. Obviously Scripture says that we can imitate our leaders, but only to the degree that our leaders are imitating Jesus. The first pattern (trying to be like others) will make our hunger directed toward man, whereas the second pattern (trying to be like God) will make your hunger vertical. The first hunger will be after social righteousness, and it will lead to Pharisaism (content to be better than others). The second hunger will be after God’s righteousness, and it will humble us because it is so far beyond our grasp. But in the hungering, it will make us addicted for more and more of God.

D. Do you have faith that God cares? (Matt 6:8)

So verse 8 deals with the real medicine from God’s hand – Do you have a faith that God cares? Verse 8 says, “**For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.**” God cares like a Father, and better than a father. If we see Him as generous, we are much more likely to hunger to the right source than if we see Him as not loving us. God wants your happiness more than you do, but He doesn’t want you to shortchange yourself with a false happiness. Have faith that God cares for you, and you will have medicine that will increase your appetite to go to Him.

E. Do your prayers include all the elements of the Lord’s Prayer (vv. 9-13)

Point E is really a whole boatload of medicines that we don’t have time to individually catalogue. But point E asks the question “Do your prayers include all the elements of the Lord’s Prayer?” Each element of this prayer is a remedy for lack of appetite. It covers personal righteousness, corporate righteousness, social righteousness, and even heavenly righteousness. It is a prayer that is consumed with a passion for God’s glory. It is a prayer that has faith to ask and receive. We don’t have time to go over it, but it truly is a great remedy. Try to pattern your prayers in private after this prayer, and you will be well on your way to hungering with the right hunger. Take each phrase and spend several minutes praying using that as a topic.

F. Do you forgive others? (Matt. 6:14-15)

Sixth question - do you forgive others? Look at verses 14-15.

Matthew 6:14 “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

Matthew 6:15 But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

This is medicine indeed that will open up the floodgates of blessing in your life. Notice that God knows that none of us will be perfect. We are commanded to forgive others as our Father forgives our trespasses. That implies that we all have trespasses. That’s why we still hunger after righteousness even after many years of Christian maturity. We will not perfectly arrive till heaven. But when we forgive others, our sins will no longer be like a millstone weighing us down and keeping us from happiness. Forgiveness is a powerful, powerful tool in God’s arsenal for keeping us filled and happy. If you don’t forgive, you will be miserable with bitterness.

One of the sure tests of whether you are a Pharisee or a hungry soul is your attitude toward the righteousness and the sins of others. Only hungry souls can say, “There but for the grace of God go I.” because they know that all their righteousness comes from God. Only spiritually hungry souls can have compassion upon other spiritually hungry souls. And they won’t get discouraged when they see people who are more righteous than they are. They know where to go for the same. And so this is another piece of medicine that you can take. When you freely forgive your spouse, your children, your parents, your enemies, and others who have hurt you, you will keep getting filled. The prayer that grants forgiveness is one of the important prayers in my spiritual warfare book. If you’ve got trouble with this, pray all the prayers of that book out loud and with passion.

G. Do you fast? (Matt 6:16)

Seventh question – Do you fast? That may seem like an odd one. If I want to be spiritually hungry, why would I make myself physically hungry too? But God has somehow ordained His blessing when we fast unto Him; not unto others, but unto Him. And notice that Matthew 6:16 doesn’t say, “If you fast.” It says, “**when you fast.**” It is assuming that this will be part of the life of person who hungers for righteousness. Somehow God has ordained that He will fill us spiritually when we do that.

H. Is your fast a hunger for God or a hunger for man’s approval? (vv. 16-18)

Eighth question – is your fast a hunger for God or a hunger for man’s approval? Verses 16-18 say,

Matthew 6:16 ¶ “Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.

Matthew 6:17 But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, **Matthew 6:18** so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who *is* in the secret *place*; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

I. Are you confident that God will pour out His blessings in your life? (v. 18; Ps. 81:10; 145:16)

And of course, that last verse I read gives the last question – “Are you confident that God will pour out His blessings in your life?” If you don’t have that confidence, it is unlikely that you will express your hungering and thirsting to Him. But if you believe Psalm 81:10 when God says, “**Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it,**” your response will be that of Psalm 145:16, “**You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing,**” or Psalm 36:8, “**They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house, and You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures.**” May that be the experience of each one in this coming week. Amen.

Charge: Hunger for righteousness; seek it from God; and may you be filled to overflowing as you drink from the river of His pleasures.

Hungering For Righteousness Matthew 5:6

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on March 7, 2009

Introduction

I. Happiness Is ...

- A. No True Happiness Without True Righteousness
 - 1. Not Self-Righteousness (Matt. 5:20; 23:25-26; Rom. 3:10; 7:18; Phil 3:9; Tit. 3:5)
 - 2. But Imputed Righteousness In Justification (Rom. 4:3-6; see also 3:21; 5:18-19; 1 Cor. 1:30; Gal. 3:6,9; Jer. 23:7; Is. 45:8; 46:12,13; 51:5; 56:1; 61:10; Rom. 4:3)
 - 3. And Imparted Righteousness In Sanctification (Acts 10:35; Gal. 3:3; Rom. 6:13,16-20; Phil. 1:11; Heb. 11:33; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:14; 1 John 2:29; 3:7,10)
- B. No True Happiness Without True Filling (John 14:23; see also Psalm 42; 63; 84; 143:6; Is. 55; Jer. 2:13; Luke 11:13; Gal. 5:22-25; Eph. 5:18)

II. Counterfeits to this beatitude

- A. Counterfeit hungers and thirsts
 - 1. More obvious false cravings and fillings
 - a) Craving to feel good (“the lust of the flesh”)
 - b) Craving to own more (“the lust of the eyes”)
 - c) Craving for advancement (“the pride of life”)
 - 2. More subtle false cravings
 - a) Hungering for man’s approval (Col. 3:22; Gal. 1:10)
 - b) Hungering to belong (John 9:22)
 - c) Hungering for the crown of righteousness (heaven) rather than the way of righteousness (Numb 23:10 vs 1 Pet 2:7)
 - d) Hungering for happiness rather than righteousness (Ezek. 33:30-33; Matt 13:20-21; Prov. 29:18; 16:20; 2Cor. 13:5; Ps 36:8)
 - e) Hungering conditionally (Matt 19:16-30 vs Job 1:21; 2:9-10)
 - f) Hungering half-heartedly (Matt 11:12; Is. 26:9; Jer. 2:13)
- B. What if I sense my own weakness?
 - 1. A weak pulse still shows life (Matt 12:20; see Mark 9:24). Go to God by faith. (Beatitude #1)
 - 2. Avoid things that hinder appetite (1Jn 2:15). (Beatitude #2)
 - 3. Work up an appetite through exercise (1Tim. 4:7; Heb. 3:13). (Beatitude #3)

III. Christ’s medical advice for lack of appetite (Matthew 6:5-18). Note that this is Christ’s exposition of beatitude #4 (see below)

- A. Who do you go to for filling? (Matt 6:5-6; Jn 14:20-23)
- B. Do you treat life like a magic formula – do this and you get this result? Or do you have a relationship with God? (Matt. 6:7; Ps. 42:1-2; 63:1)
- C. Do you pattern your life after others or after God? (Matt 6:8a)
- D. Do you have faith that God cares? (Matt 6:8)
- E. Do your prayers include all the elements of the Lord’s Prayer (vv. 9-13)
- F. Do you forgive others? (Matt. 6:14-15)
- G. Do you fast? (Matt 6:16)
- H. Is your fast a hunger for God or a hunger for man’s approval? (vv. 16-18)
- I. Are you confident that God will pour out His blessings in your life? (v. 18; Ps. 81:10; 145:16)



