

The Beatitudes- Matthew 5:1-12

A study

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"Blessed are those Who Hunger and Thirst after Righteousness, for they Shall be Filled."

In the last three studies, we learned that the poor in spirit are those who are totally dependent upon the Living God both for life and salvation. The mourners are not "cry babies" but those who mourn over their own sins and the sins of others who sin against a Holy God. In our last study we learned about the meek, who are not weak, but truly have a right estimate of themselves in light of their relationship to God Almighty.

Today's study is about those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Who are these people and what are they like?

A Big Appetite for Righteousness

Those who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness have a big appetite for righteousness. Those who hunger and thirst after righteousness *persistently pursue and long for a righteous, Christ-likeness so that they may live satisfied and full lives before the face of God!*

It is strange that we find righteousness and holiness to be so strange when we see glimpses of it in others. When those who don't believe in Christ see Christ's followers seeking holiness or righteousness, they are taken back by it.

We should rather be taken back by those who *do not* hunger and thirst after righteousness. For in reality, hungering and thirsting after God and His righteousness in our lives is the only thing that will ever satisfy the hunger of the longing of our souls! Seeking righteousness should be quite natural and normal for all of us!

Righteousness and holiness were the reasons for which we were created because we were created to be in fellowship with God and to show forth his likeness (Gen. 1:26-28). The first sin of Adam, and the fall of man into sin and misery should have ruined any possibility of hope for those characterized by sin rather than righteousness, but God in His grace held out hope and grace from

the very beginning in promising a Seed who would accomplish righteousness for those who believe (Gen. 3:15).

"Better than Life!"

Christ came as representative and Savior of those who believe and he only hungered and thirsted after righteousness. He sought it with all his heart! We see glimpses of this desire for righteousness in David's desires for God expressed beautifully in Psalm 63.

Psalm 63: "O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you. On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night. Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings. My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.

One of my students and friends wrote to me concerning this psalm in a recent e-mail. She wrote: "I love this psalm, which was written when David was in the desert of Judah. Although he does not have much to feast upon ("in a dry and weary land where there is no water"), he feasts upon God's word ("My soul will be satisfied with the richest of foods"), and finds in it all that he needs to sustain himself." That's a living expression of what it means to hunger and thirst after righteousness.

God's Word teaches us about the righteousness of Christ. The Word of God reveals Christ to us so that we might come to know him and be saved. It promises us that if we believe in Him, we shall be united to Him, and we shall be like Him. As we come to look upon Christ in His Word (through preaching and the Lord's Supper), we come to persistently pursue and long for more of Him to be formed in us! Do you long for Christ to be formed in you?

Notice in Psalm 63 that David cries out to God that his love is *better than life* itself! David knew, as we should come to learn in Christ, that the only life worth living is the life lived in obedience to God's Word, hungering and thirsting after righteousness and Christ-likeness. David, and we who live on this side of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, who have a portion of the Spirit of God given to us, ought to persistently pursue and long for a righteous Christ-likeness so that we might live satisfied and full lives before the face of God!

Eat, Drink, and Truly Be Merry!

Why are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness *hungry and thirsty*? Because of the fall into sin and misery, the world is full of sin and selfish disobedience to the Living God. Righteousness is not found naturally within our own souls or hearts, and definitely not found in others around us.

When we look for glimpses of glory, sparks of divine righteousness around us in our world, we are more likely to find sin and the consequences of unrighteous and unholy living. In fact, it makes us feel quite unclean, but we are not merely the victims as Christians, we are part of the sin problem. However, as Christians we struggle with our sinful and selfish tendencies so that we might become more like Christ (Romans 7)!

We want to ask Christ our Lord for more of a hunger, desire, and thirst for the Living God. Just as our bodies crave food and thirst for water, so our souls created by God long to be satisfied with only God Himself! Have you ever thought how unnatural it is for us *not to pursue* righteousness and holiness. Think of the deer spoken of by David in Psalm 42:

"As the deer pants or longs for the water, so my soul longs after the God."

Think of this illustration and analogy to the deer. The deer doesn't think logically, merely with his mind, "Hmmm, I think it is time for me to drink." No! Rather, the deer is driven to the streams of water so that he might quench his thirst. Think about when we are hungry. We don't say, "I think I will work up an appetite." We are naturally hungry during the day (3 times or more?!) and we are driven to seek to eat and drink. It is natural and normal. If the truth be known, we can't work up a hunger and thirst...we don't make ourselves this way, it happens naturally!

So should our persistent pursuit of Christ-likeness be for the Christian. As we come to learn of Christ's loveliness and more of his mercy, we desire to know Him and His Word much better. We long to truly understand how the Spirit has united us closely to Him and we long to be more like him- -in every way. The Apostle Paul wanted to know this. In Philippians 3, Paul exuberantly writes:

Philippians 3:7-14: But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ⁹ 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-¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.¹² 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.¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Paul wanted to leave behind all of his futile and self-righteous pursuits of righteousness in his life as a Pharisee. What he wanted was the kind of knowledge and relationship with God found only in the Person of Jesus Christ! He said he counted all of his prestigious pedigree as "rubbish" so that he might gain Christ. But what specifically did he want to "gain" in Christ?

A Righteousness in Christ

The Apostle Paul wanted to be found "in Him", having a righteousness that depends on faith (v. 9). He wanted to know the power of Christ's resurrection, the sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, so that he could attain the unbelievable hope of the resurrection from the dead. And Paul was determined to strain forward to attain this by faith alone (v. 13-14). This is a picture of a pursuit of righteous Christ-likeness through a knowledge of our Savior that is both doctrinal and personal.

What it means that this pursuit of righteousness is both doctrinal and personal is that we pursue the Christ held out to us in God's revelation of Scripture. We try to come to a better understanding of how God has revealed himself through His Word to us, and we remember to do this together with all the saints (Eph. 3:18). Personally, we come to take part in the sufferings of Christ after taking part in His resurrection when we are regenerated and our hearts are made new when we first believe in Christ.

We then walk before the face of God all of our lives, coming to understand better our close bond and union we have with the Living Christ in our lives. As He is the Vine, so we are the branches. We draw from his own innate righteousness throughout the Christian life, as we seek to emulate and pursue the same kind of righteousness that he has. We don't have an innate righteousness, but when we become Christians he gives us a clothing of his righteousness that justifies us before God. Then as we live "in Him" and "for Him" in obedience to Him, he works in us that which is good and pleasing, according to his will. As Paul says in Philippians 3:12, we press on and forward because Jesus has made us His own. We more and more hunger and thirst for righteous Christ-likeness!

Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness ultimately long to know and to be like Jesus! They long to become more righteous as the gnawing in our stomachs from hunger, or the dry, parched mouths desiring water, so the "hungry and thirsty" are looking to only One for satisfaction.

Who Do You Want to Be Like?

Who do you long to be like? We oftentimes want to be like other people. We have people that we know and people that we admire that we want to emulate. We have heroes and heroines that are not always examples of righteousness, yet we look to them to see how they dress, how they walk and talk, how they interact with others. We want to be like them!

When we ponder God's grace and goodness in Jesus Christ held out to us in the Word of God and the Lord's Supper, and then consciously and constantly meditate upon Jesus as Glorified God-Man, we will long to be like him! I encourage you to meditate upon Jesus Christ as the ascended Savior at the right hand of God. We often forget and become functional Greek Gnostics who deny

the humanity of Jesus Christ. However, we must remember that our Mediator, Jesus Christ THE Righteous One, has a human face at the right hand of God! This will encourage your pursuit of His righteousness.

HE is the picture of perfection and righteousness for which we all truly long! Jesus was perfect as Divine Being, but when he took upon himself a human nature without a sin problem of the heart, he learned righteousness and obedience as a man. It is hard for us to fathom, but when he said "Thy will be done, O Lord", these were true and sincere words he spoke prayerfully to the Father.

As Divine, Christ was indeed omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent, but this Divine One loved His own so much that he clothed himself with flesh and became man. As human, Christ was not omniscient, but learning; not omnipresent, but local; not omnipotent, but limited. It is hard for us to fully understand, but it is how God has revealed Jesus Christ to us in His Holy Word! So why is this helpful to your pursuit of righteousness? Because He can truly both sympathize with your weakness, as well as, and perhaps more importantly, help you in your weakness and weak pursuit of righteousness (Heb. 4:14-16).

Read carefully Hebrews 5:1-8 to get a glimpse of this righteousness that was pursued FIRST by Jesus Christ himself!

Hebrews 5:1-8: For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. ² He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. ³ Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people. ⁴ And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was. ⁵ So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"; ⁶ as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek." ⁷ In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. ⁸ Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. ⁹ And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him...

We ought to reflect upon how Jesus learned obedience through his suffering and was being made perfect (vv. 8-9). As Hebrews 12 says, he is the ultimate example of faith that is set for us. Yes, He is truly God; Yes, He is truly man. For those who trust in him and begin to understand their living union with Him, should know that hungering and thirsting after righteousness is set forth for us in the life and death of Jesus.

"Unrighteous Righteousness"

But a lot of people call themselves "righteous". There are people all around who do good deeds, think of themselves as "good" and don't see a need for Christ and His righteousness. What is the wrong kind of righteousness? In Matthew

5:20, Jesus warned of the wrong kind of righteousness. He said that His follower's righteousness *must exceed* the righteousness of the Scribes and the Pharisees. Now that would have completely shocked the people!

If there was one supposed guarantee in Israel at the time of Jesus, it was that Scribes and Pharisees were going to be in heaven, even if the rest of the world didn't make it. They did all kinds of external righteous deeds that impressed people. But this external righteousness was not good enough. Neither is this mere external righteousness good enough for people who are trying live this way today. This kind of righteousness actually kills, according to Jesus. He said not only that our righteousness *must exceed the Scribe and the Pharisee*, but he said those whose righteousness *did not exceed, would not enter the Kingdom of Heaven*. There will be plenty of externally righteous people, people with good reputations in society that will have gained the respect of the whole world, but who will lose their own souls on the Day of Jesus Christ.

"Do the Right Thing?"

As Isaiah prophesies, we must repent even of our best deeds because without Christ they are as filthy rags (Is. 64:6). The wrong kind of righteousness is merely an external righteousness without a true root of saving faith within the heart. We should remember (as the Apostle Paul learned the hard way), that righteousness is not merely living externally by rules. Righteousness is not only doing the right thing... (as the Pharisees did fine externally).

The righteousness we are to pursue is not merely an external, "going-through-the-motions" kind of righteousness. It is an internal disposition created in the human heart by the Spirit of God when we are born again and become new creations in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). It could be described as a righteousness that is "*grateful because of His grace taking away our guilt before God*" kind of righteousness!

As I said before, we are not merely to *do the right thing*, but to be doing the right thing for the right reasons. What is doing the right thing for the right reasons? Doing all that we do out of love for God and gratitude for what he has done for us in Christ! This is an inward change of heart or a "change of appetite". One way of checking your attitude is to ask yourself this question: "Do I concentrate on the righteous things I do for God, or do I focus on the righteous things God has done for me?!" This will help you to determine whether you are trusting in God's righteousness revealed in Christ, or your own righteousness.

The good news for sinners who do not have any inherent righteousness, is that a righteousness has been revealed by God for those who would look to Christ. The righteousness that we need and want to know is found in the Person of Jesus Christ:

Romans 1:17: For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith.

The Pursuit of Satisfaction or the Pursuit of Righteousness?

Do you pursue righteousness, or do you cry: "I don't Get No Satisfaction"? Have you a desire to have all of your spiritual needs met by the only One who can do it? We search desperately in this fallen world to find something or sometimes someone who will meet our needs and satisfy our longings.

Only God can satisfy, all other things and others will leave us starving and dry. The Israelites hungered and thirsted to go back to Egypt rather than trusting in God's Word and seeking him. We must watch our tendencies to find in "Egypt" or in this world the fulfillment of our soul's longings. Many try, but many come up empty and fail. We must place our trust in the Living and Righteous Christ who fulfilled and exceeded the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees so that we might be found in him, not having a righteousness of our own, but a righteousness that comes by faith in Jesus!

Furthermore, once we are united to Him, we must be constantly keeping our eyes on this Jesus. As we continue to seek him, we will long for him more! As we grow in our knowledge of His righteousness, beauty and holiness, we will desire to have this kind of righteousness. An although the world might starve and die of thirst because their empty souls can only be satisfied by God alone, those who place their trust in Christ shall be filled!

We will find at the end of our persistent pursuit and longing for Christ-likeness a true filling and quenching of our thirsts. As David says in Psalm 17:15:

As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness.

The Apostle John teaches us of this great hope of being filled, being like Christ one day in his first letter. He writes:

1 John 3:1-3: See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. ³ And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

As children of the Living God, we know that what we will one day be is not yet, but we know that when he appears and returns for those He loves, we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is! John says that this is our hope "in Christ" and therefore we are to purify ourselves as he is pure!

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall indeed be filled!

Soli Deo Gloria!

Next Study: "Blessed are the Merciful"