

 Blessed 

*are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
for they will be filled.*



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# Reminder

The first four beatitudes describe the needs of a disciple.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness” is the last in the series (Matt. 5:3–6).

It starts with the first Beatitude. Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (v. 3).

To be poor in spirit is to know one’s spiritual neediness and dependence on God (Ps. 34:6; Zeph. 3:12).

# Reminder

The second, “Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted” is a continuation. The poor in spirit mourn their poverty (Matt. 5:4). They mourn their losses, sinfulness and then the condition of others.

This is a blessed mourning, since God will comfort those who mourn over sin. Psalm 119:136 says, “My eyes shed streams of tears, because people do not keep your law.”

Those who mourn realize that God is with them, God is aware of their situation and God is present to help.

# Reminder

The second beatitude leads to the third: those who know their spiritual poverty and mourn it will be meek: “Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth”.

To be meek is the opposite of arrogance, jealousy, and selfish ambition (2 Cor. 10:1; James 3:13–14; 1 Peter 3:15–16).

Meekness contrasts with the self-assertion that is born of selfishness. Meekness is strength under control or gentleness. Meekness is exemplified in the lives of Abraham, Moses, Joseph, Jesus, etc.

# Hunger and thirst for righteousness

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness” is then the pivotal beatitude (Matt. 5:6). If disciples are “poor in spirit, mourn, become meek,” they will then ask God to meet their need for righteousness.

“Hunger and thirst” is a metaphor that doesn’t resonate much today as it did in Jesus’ day. Food and water were scarce.

Hungry, thirsty people work hard, and urgently to gain food. To hunger and thirst for righteousness, then, means we should urgently pursue righteousness.

# Hunger and thirst for righteousness

It is worth noting that language of hunger and thirst is well known in Scripture.

God says, “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! ... You will delight in the richest of fare” (Isa. 55:1–2).

Jesus offers, “Whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst” (John 6:35).

# The Word, Righteousness

Righteousness has several meanings in Scripture. Paul speaks of the legal righteousness we receive through the atoning work of Christ. Matthew calls Jesus a “ransom for many” (20:28) and he describes the atonement itself (27:38–46).

According to Jesus, in Matt. 5, the disciples’ personal righteousness cause them to put aside murder, anger, and adultery. They give to oppressors and love their enemies (vv. 22–48).

Thirsty disciples also pursue mercy, purity, and peacemaking as shared in the next few beatitudes (vv. 7–9).

# Hunger and Thirst...

## Meaning

So, to hunger for righteousness is to yearn for God's rule in our lives (Matt. 6:33). It is to have a thirst for God's Word and for the company of the godly. Scripturally, righteousness has several aspects.

First, is the personal righteousness. This hunger leads us to uproot our sin by the power of the Holy Spirit and become more like Jesus. This is sanctification.

Second, is the Christ righteousness, bestowed when we believe in Him. This is justification. Justification confers legal righteousness, so believers can stand before God the Judge on the last day. It wipes away all sin and guilt, whatever our level of sanctification.



# Hunger and Thirst...

## Meaning

Third, disciples long for social righteousness, for God's cleansing of society.

Hunger for righteousness leads disciples to promote God's cause in business, education, politics, and more.

We look forward to the day of Jesus' return, when He will set creation right, Satan will be overthrown, and God's righteousness will cover the earth.

# So....

Let us look at

- ❖ The Pragmatism of living out this righteousness
- ❖ The Power of hunger and thirst
- ❖ The Promises associated with being filled.

# I. The Pragmatism of Righteousness

The term righteousness occurs only once in the other four gospels. However, it occurs seven times in Matthew's gospel, including five times in the Sermon on the Mount.

It has to do with being right and doing right. But the question is, **“How is righteousness lived out?”**

Let us look at other passages of Scripture that may shed more light on it especially at the four other uses of this word in the Sermon on the Mount.

# I. The Pragmatism of Righteousness

**A. Righteousness is a lifestyle that distinguishes us as true Christians and invites opposition from the world.**

Jesus said, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness" (Matt. 5:10). That's the eighth and final beatitude. Taking the fourth and eighth beatitudes together, we get something like this: We are to hunger and to thirst after a kind of life that will cause some people to persecute us for our faith.

So, righteousness is a lifestyle that distinguishes us as true Christians and invites opposition from the world.

# I. Pragmatism of Righteousness

**B. Righteousness starts in the heart and changes a person from the inside out.**

In the second use Jesus said, "For I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20).

The Pharisees concocted a religious system built around attendance at the temple, intricate rules and regulations and following precepts and traditions. Ex. Wearing cheap perfume.

True righteousness starts in the heart and changes a person from the inside out.

# I. The Pragmatism of Righteousness

**C. Righteousness doesn't need to be seen by others, but only by God.**

In the third use of this word, Jesus said: "Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of people, to be seen by them. Otherwise, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven" (Matt. 6:1).

The Pharisees loved to pray in public - loudly! They loved to dress up in their religious garb and throw their offering in the metal container so people could hear the coins rattle. They would sacrifice anything to win the praise of others. Their religion was built on the praise of men. True disciples seek a righteousness that doesn't need to be seen by others, but only by God.

# I. The Pragmatism of Righteousness

**D. Righteousness causes us to seek God's approval above everything else.**

"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you" (Matthew 6:33).

This touches the priorities of life. What do you seek? Fame, fortune, career advancement?

As good as those things may be, they aren't the most important things in life.

Seeking "His righteousness" means letting his Word set the standard for your life and doing that which is pleasing to him.

# In Essence

Putting these four passages together, we learn that we are to hunger and thirst after:

A true Christian lifestyle ... that changes us from the inside out ... so that we no longer seek the praise of men ... but God's approval above everything else.

This kind of life is possible for all of us. In fact, Jesus plainly says that anyone who lives this way is blessed by God.

So why don't we all live this way? That question leads us directly to the second important principle.



# II. The Power of Hunger

"You are what you eat." Nutritionists tell us that our appetites determine our diet, our diet determines our intake, and our intake determines our health.

"You are what you eat" applies in the spiritual realm as well. Jesus challenges us to look at our spiritual appetite with the penetrating words of the Fourth Beatitude: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, because they will be filled" (Matthew 5:6).

In this simple sentence, Jesus tells us that our hunger determines our spiritual health.

# II. The Power of Hunger

## A. You have to want it badly.

No one can force you to eat. The old adage is true: “You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink.” Like food, you have to want to live a righteous life.

The verbs for hunger and thirst mean an intense desire, an ardent craving, and all-consuming pursuit. It is as though you are parched, and nothing will stop you from getting to the water fountain to drink. Or, you are so hungry you will pursue food at all costs. It's an act of desperation.

It is that same kind of passion and drive that should motive the believer to pursue righteousness.

# **II. The Power of Hunger**

## **A. You have to want it badly**

"As a deer longs for streams of water, so I long for You, God. I thirst for God, the living God. When can I come and appear before God?" (Psa. 42:1-2).

"God, You are my God; I eagerly seek You. I thirst for You; my body faints for You in a land that is dry, desolate, and without water" (Psa. 63:1).

Do you have that kind of desperation for a Christian lifestyle that changes you from the inside out?

Can you say to Jesus, "I not only want you, but I need you. And, I not only need you, I must have you"?

# II. The Power of Hunger

## B. You need to take action

Appetites aren't filled until you do something about it. It is one thing to intellectually say I am hungry and desire food and quite another to take the steps to satisfy your hunger and to quench your thirst. At some point you have to go eat or drink.

A loss of appetite is a sign of illness. The same is true spiritually. When we no longer spend time alone with God in worship, read our Bible and pray, or fail to get alarmed over our sinful condition and the sin of the world, that maybe signs of spiritual sickness.

Take appropriate action to develop and deepen your relationship with God.

# II. The Power of Hunger

## B. You need to take action

The action we need to take is to go to the source - the Bread of Life.

Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. No one who comes to Me will ever be hungry, and no one who believes in Me will ever be thirsty again ... I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread he will live forever. The bread that I will give for the life of the world is My flesh" (John 6:35, 51).

God says, "Why do you spend your money on junk food, your hard-earned cash on cotton candy? Listen to me, listen well: Eat only the best, fill yourself with only the finest" (Isa. 55:2).

# II. The Power of Hunger

Many people today are looking for satisfaction in all the wrong places, trying to satisfy the craving of their hearts with junk of this world, or in the church and are spiritually malnourished.

You need to come and stay with Jesus - the source of life itself. You need to feed upon Him with balanced, daily diet of prayer and the study of God's Word.

You need to drink from His cup through life giving worship. You need to feast on His love and his grace, His forgiveness, and His power.

# II. The Power of Hunger

## C. You need to keep coming back for more

Grammatically Jesus expressed the two Greek verbs, "to hunger" and "to thirst," as present participles, which implies continuous action.

Read the fourth beatitude closely: Those who are filled are not those who have their hunger and thirst met, but those who are continually hungering and thirsting.

A person doesn't stop hungering and thirsting for righteousness once he or she has crossed the line of faith. It is a constant pursuit to live a life of righteousness, to yearn to be more and more like Christ.

# II. The Power of Hunger

## C. You need to keep coming back for more

Are you hungering and thirsting for righteousness? Is it a continual pursuit? Are you coming back for more?

Hungering and thirsting for righteousness is like a narcotic. You get hooked or addicted. You need more. You keep coming back. Once you have encountered the living God nothing else satisfies. You want more and more of Him.

John MacArthur said, "If you claim a relationship with Christ but you aren't hungering and thirsting for righteousness, you need to honestly question whether you know Him."



# II. The Power of Hunger

## D. You need to Eat the whole thing

Believers don't seek bits and pieces of righteousness. They seek all the righteousness of Christ in their desire to be like him.

What Jesus is saying is not "Give me a piece of bread;" but, rather, "Give me the whole loaf." The Christian is never satisfied because no matter how much righteousness he has, he doesn't have all that is available.

The person who hungers and thirsts after righteousness wants it all. They want all of God.

# II. The Power of Hunger

Some just want enough of God to appease not to change us; to get us into right standing, avoiding the fire of hell, but not enough to bring on the kind of righteousness that would radically change our lives. As long as it is superficial change, we're okay. A little cosmetic surgery is fine.

Someone wrote: *"I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please, not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep, but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk or a snooze in the sunshine. I don't want enough of him to make me love a black man or pick beets with a migrant. I want ecstasy, not transformation; I want the warmth of the womb, not a new birth. I want a pound of the Eternal in a paper sack. I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please."*

# **III. The promise of fulfillment**

"They will be filled." With what? Food? No. Money? No. Long life? No. Promotion? No. Happiness? No. A perfect family? No. A trouble-free life? No. What then?

## **A. You will be filled with righteousness**

If you want righteousness, you can have it. If you want for a truly Christian lifestyle that changes us from the inside out so that we no longer seek the praise of men but causes us to seek God's approval above everything else, you can have it.

# III. The promise of fulfillment

## A. You will be filled with righteousness

Whatever you want in the spiritual realm, you can have if you want it badly enough:

If you want it, you can have a close walk with God or a better marriage.

If you want to, you can do God's will and grow spiritually.

If you want to, you can become a man of God or a woman of God.

If you want to, you can change deeply-ingrained habits.

If you want to, you can break destructive patterns of behavior.

When you hunger and thirst after righteousness, when you want what God wants more than anything in the world, you will have it.

# III. The Promise of Fulfillment

## B. You will be filled with Jesus Himself

Jesus' appeal is always personal. He never says, "Come and join the church" or "Come and be baptized" or "Come and give money." He simply says, "Come unto me." When Jesus says, "You will be filled," He means "You will be filled with Jesus himself!"

- ❖ If you are hungry, come and eat of the Bread of Life.
- ❖ If you are thirsty, come and drink of the Water of Life.
- ❖ If are weary and heavy-laden, come and find rest.
- ❖ If you are guilty, come and be forgiven.
- ❖ If you are far from God, come back home again.

# III. The Promise of Fulfillment

## **B. You will be filled with Jesus Himself**

We're like a little child who won't let go of the marble in order to receive a diamond. "No, I won't give up my weekend affair for eternal joy. Trade a broken marriage and a failed career for peace and forgiveness? Forget it. Give up my drug addiction and be forgiven for all my sins? No way, man. You say I can replace my anger and bitterness with peace and contentment? I can't take the chance. Sorry."

No wonder we stay the way we are. We're trapped in the pit of a thousand excuses. We'd rather have misery and pain than risk it all on Jesus.

# And So What?

Let me give you some good news. In the kingdom of God, everything begins with a seeking heart! Salvation begins with a hungry heart. If you are tired of the life you've been living, you can make a new start.

Whatever you want in the spiritual realm, you can have if you want it badly enough. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." Are you hungry? Are you thirsty? If you are, you can be filled. This is the promise of God to hungry hearts and thirsty souls.