

Blessed Are Those Who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness

The Beatitudes #5

Matthew 5:6

Oh God, you are my God. And I will earnestly seek you. I thirst for you and my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water. I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. Forever.

I once heard the story of a young man who kneeled before a beautiful young woman beside a placid lake. “Sweetheart,” he said. “I want you to know that I love you more than life. I want you to marry me. I’m not a wealthy man. I don’t have a yacht. I don’t have a Rolls Royce. I don’t even have lots of money like Johnny Green. But I do love you with all my heart.” The young woman paused for a moment and said, “Sugarpie, I love you with all my heart too. But before I say ‘yes,’ tell me a little more about Johnny Green.”

There is a universal truth contained in that Johnny Green Parable. It is this: our hunger and thirsts and passions in life can often be misguided. Everyone on this earth has a hunger and thirst for something. Unfortunately, like Johnny Lee said in that old country and western song, we often look for love in all the wrong places. In the fourth beatitude, Jesus tells us what it means to look for love in the only right place. The only hunger our souls have that can be satisfied and the only thirst our souls have that can be quenched is the hunger and thirst for righteousness. For those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be satisfied.

Now righteousness is what I call a \$3 word. It’s an SAT word. But for us today, it’s an important word that is part of a chain reaction. Those who have been made to be poor in spirit will mourn over their sin. Then, they will in meekness turn to Jesus. When they do, a new longing of their heart is born. It’s the hunger and thirst for righteous. Today, we see (1) what righteousness is; (2) what hunger and thirst is; (3) what being filled is; and (4) why it matters.

1. What Righteousness Is

- **Cheap Cologne:** (1) Sharon Cash was her name. She was my “study date” for an English test. The bad part about this “study date” was that it occurred 30 minutes after football practice. The dreadful part about this “study date” was that I didn’t shower after practice. The foolish part about this “study date” was that that I went to Walgreens and bought a bottle of Blue Aqua Velva thinking I could make myself smell good without a shower and cover the odor. The forgettable part of it was that the Blue Aqua Velva couldn’t cover the odor.
- **Righteousness and the Pharisees Approach to It:** (1) Righteousness means “a right standing before God and others.” The problem comes in trying to achieve it. (2) The Pharisees approached righteousness similar to the way a high school student puts on Blue Aqua Velva in an attempt to cover their odor underneath. Pharisee means “zeal” and they were zealous about the appearance of righteousness. (3) They washed their hands before eating, but not because it was good hygiene. They thought people were sinning if they forgot and brought judicial charges against people if they didn’t. (4) They gave a tenth of everything as a tithe, even food. And let people know it. (4) They wore fancy regalia so that people would honor them. And they engaged in frequent public fasts so that people could see how spiritual they were. (5) And it’s the attempt to reach righteousness exteriorly that Jesus took issue the most with. “You give a tenth of all you have, yet you ignore the weightier matters of the law,” Jesus said, which is to “seek justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God. You should have concentrated on the later without neglecting the former.” (6) It was a Blue Aqua Velva approach that couldn’t mask the internal odor.
- **But the Way Jesus Approached Righteousness Was Altogether Different.** The word “righteousness” only occurs 7 times in the Gospels, 5 of which are right here in the Sermon on the Mount. Righteousness, according to Jesus, (1) Starts in the Heart and Changes a Person from the Inside Out: “Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven” (Mt 5:20). The Pharisees concocted a religious system built on the exteriors. “No,” Jesus said, “it starts on the interior.” (2) It Doesn’t Need to Be Seen By Others – “Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven,” Jesus said (Mt 6:1). Instead, when you give to the needy, don’t announce it with trumpets. Do it in secret. Pray in the same way. And your father, “who sees what is done in secret will reward you” (Mt 6:6). (3) It Seeks God’s Approval Above Everything Else – “Seek first the kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you” (Mt 6:33). (4) It Invites Opposition from the Word – “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness” and “blessed are you when people speak all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad on that day,” Jesus said, “for people treated the prophets in the same day” and “great will be your reward in the Kingdom of Heaven” (Mt 5:10-12).
- **App:** “The pursuit of God is not a part-time, weekend exercise. If it is, chances are you will experience a part-time, weekend freedom. The pursuit, instead, is relentless. It hungers and thirsts. It pants as the deer after the mountain brook. We sign up for duration. And we do not graduate from that pursuit until heaven.” -- R.C. Sproul.

2. What Hunger and Thirst Is

- **Loss of Appetite at Thanksgiving:** (1) Thanksgiving is right around the corner. That means Smoked Turkey and Honey Baked Ham are about to be realities. That means Cornbread Dressing and Pecan Pie are about to adorn our tables. (2) But if, on Thanksgiving, one of your family

members took a seat at the table and said, “I don’t have much of an appetite,” your response would be “what is wrong?” (3) We know something is wrong when we have no desire to eat. The same is true spiritually.

- **Amos Predicted a Famine in the Land:** “Behold the days are coming,” declares the Lord God, “when I will send a famine on the land – not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord” (Amos 8:11)
- **In Jesus’ Day and In Our Day, Amos’ Words Ring True:** (1) Those listening to Jesus’ words on the mountain lived under the oppressive rule of the Roman Empire. They were experiencing excessive taxation, denied freedoms, and living with the everyday threat of real persecution. But they sat at the Thanksgiving Table with no appetite and didn’t recognize that there was a problem. (2) Similarly, we face increasing taxation, and we see freedoms being stripped away day by day. And we also sit at the Thanksgiving Table and don’t become concerned with our lack of appetite because we don’t even recognize something is wrong.
- **But According to Jesus Here, Blessing, Happiness, Fulfillment, and Satisfaction is Found in Hungering and Thirsting for Righteousness.** (1) That Means You Have to Desire It: The verbs for hunger and thirst mean an intense desire, an ardent craving, and all-consuming pursuit. In the midst of a famine of the word of God, you must hunger and thirst for it! (2) And You Have to Act: It’s one thing to say I am hungry and desire food. It’s quite another to take the steps to satisfy your hunger and quench your thirst. (3) And Continue to Act: “Hunger” and “Thirst” are present participles, which implies continues action. (4) And Clean Your Plate – We often want bits and pieces of righteousness. Not all of it. We say: “give me a piece of bread, Lord.” But here, Jesus says you’ve got to ask for the whole loaf.
- **As Seen in the Parable of the Persistent Widow:** “Give me justice against my adversary,” the persistent widow asked the judge. For some time, the judge refused. But the widow kept persisting and kept pursuing the judge until he granted her request. Why was her request answered? Because of the hunger and thirst in asking.

3. Filled

- **Food in Foreign Countries:** (1) You cannot wait to get a taste of the local cuisine in foreign countries, can you? However, after about 3 days of eating the local cuisine, you begin to long for a greasy American cheeseburger! (2) That poses a bit of a problem in Israel, where there are kosher laws that prevent restaurants from serving meat and dairy together. (3) But if you want one bad enough, you can bring it about. You can go a bakery and get bread. And go to another place and get cheese. And another place to get beef. Then you can mix them together yourself. You just have to eat it where no one can see you.
- **For the Hungry and Thirsty for Righteousness, Being Filled is a Promise That is True Personally:** (1) To be filled, is to be complete, not lacking in anything. It is a promise, like all of the rest in the beatitudes that is both now and not yet. (2) It means that whatever you desire in the spiritual realm, you have to want it badly enough to pursue it. You can have as much joy as you want, but you have to hunger and thirst for it. You can have as much peace as you want, but you have to hunger and thirst for it. You can have a better marriage, but you have to hunger and thirst for it. You can change ingrained habits. But you have to hunger and thirst for it. You can change destructive patterns of behavior. But you have to hunger and thirst for it. You can bring about a better church, one more influential in this community, for the Gospel, than it already is. But you have to hunger and thirst for it. (3) Jesus said as much: ⁹ *“Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? ¹¹ If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! (Mt. 7:9-11).*
- **It’s True Relationally:** The Apostle John was the David of the NT. He was “after” Jesus in his life, just like David was. He was closer to Jesus in life than any other apostle. He was a literal friend of God. Consequently, he tells us things about Jesus that the other Gospels don’t (I am the Resurrection and the Life, etc.). If you seek him, you will find him. And be satisfied. And understand him in ways you didn’t before.
- **It’s True Eternally:** Simeon longed to see the face of the Messiah before his death. God gave him his wish to be point that he could say “my eyes have seen the glory, now may your servant depart in peace.” Simeon’s eyes saw the glory. Our eyes will see the glory. That’s a fact. It’s going to happen. And when that day comes in the sweet by and by, we will not see the face of God and die. We will see it and live!

4. Why It Matters

- **The Chorus in the Tornados:** (1) During the tornados this week, these words from As the Deer flooded my soul: You’re my friend and you are my brother even though you are a King. I love you more than any other. So much more than anything.
- **There is a direct correlation between fulfillment in life, joy in life, and hungering and thirsting for righteousness.** In the midst of trials, James said “consider it all joy when you face trials of many kinds.” Why? He hungered and thirsted for righteousness. And was satisfied.
- **You are as close to God right now as you want to be.** If there is no hunger and thirsting for righteousness, you are content with where you are. And that’s why you are not fulfilled and satisfied right now. If there is a hunger and thirst for righteousness, you are not content with where you are. But you will be satisfied by Him in your pursuit of him. Jesus promises you as much.
- **There has never been one single case in history of someone who hungered and thirsted for righteousness ever not being filled and satisfied.** Jesus said: “seek and you will find.” There’s a reason for that: The Provident Seeker knows you are seeking. And he fully intends on satisfying your hunger and thirst with good gifts from above. That’s the truth! And the truth will set you free!