

“HUNGERING AND THIRSTING AFTER RIGHTEOUSNESS”

Matthew 5:6

Intro: We come today to the fourth of the Beatitudes in which our Lord was describing the character, or the characteristics of a child of God. And His use of the word “blessed” indicates, as we have seen on the last three Sundays, that the Christian is to be a happy person and that his life is to be a happy life. Everybody is interested in being happy, but the tragedy is that most people have no idea as to where true happiness is to be found, *and so they look for it in the wrong places*. People do not know, for example, that in denying the importance of character they are closing the door to any possibility of true and lasting happiness. Our Lord was saying in these Beatitudes that happiness is not the result of who we are, nor of where we are, nor of what we have. *It is the result of what we are!*

So while people try to build up their self-esteem, they show that they have never learned that it is those who learn that they are “poor in spirit” are on their way to finding happiness. And when we learn that we have nothing that commends us to God, but everything to draw His wrath because of our sinfulness, and we become deeply grieved over that, we are taking a further step toward lasting happiness. And that is because we also learn the way to have our sins forgiven and our hearts cleansed. It is not by anything that we can do for ourselves, but it is because Christ died for sinners. All who trust Him for the forgiveness of their sins are “comforted” because through the death of Christ we are made acceptable to God. Such an experience of salvation makes us “meek,” *humble, gentle*. We know that we do not deserve what Christ has done for us, that we really have nothing to boast about. We know that we are all indebted to God for all that He has done for us, and we want to live our lives in such a way as to show our gratitude to Him for the gift of salvation.

All of these characteristics will be growing in the heart of a true child of God. We see more clearly what we are apart from Christ. We regret more deeply the sins which we have committed. And we are increasingly humbled by the grace of God. But our joy is not just in learning that we are sinners in need of salvation, but that God has given us this knowledge that we might be saved, that we might be forgiven, and that we might learn that humility, not pride, leads to the inheritance of the earth.

The situation that our country faces in the Middle East at this time is an illustration of what a precarious position we are in as a nation. We are riddled through and through with sin as a nation. We think that we are

invincible. We are faced with a situation in Iraq that our leaders are saying that they can't really solve. And yet we may be moving toward one of the greatest mistakes our nation has ever made. With all of the troubles we face within our nation and the troubles on the international scene, our leaders seem totally blind to the fact that God has a hand in all of this. We talk about El Nino, but nobody seems to know that God is the One Who makes the rain to fall. Crime is out of hand. We as a nation are intent on doing what we want to do, and most people never stop to think about God and what is pleasing to Him. *So instead of finding happiness through God, and through His Son the Lord Jesus Christ, we are going deeper and deeper into that which is going to cause us as a nation more and more unhappiness!* We do not stop to realize that the great nations of the earth that have fallen, have all fallen because God has destroyed them because of their sin. *And the same thing can happen to us! God is a very patient God, but there comes a time when His patience is exhausted. It is very possible that we are right at the outer boundary of His patience.*

Perhaps the most disturbing fact about the situation today is that many who profess to be Christians have gotten careless about their lives, and are going along with our pleasure-mad society and world. As I have reminded you before, during World War II we heard a lot about 2 Chron. 7:14. It is a word which God gave to His servant Solomon after Solomon had prayed that wonderful prayer at the dedication of the Temple he had built. And the Lord was speaking of those times when He would bring judgments upon His people. This is what He said:

If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land (2 Chron. 7:14).

We are a nation that stands in desperate need of God, but we as a nation are doing everything to bring His judgment upon us. We may not like to talk about sin, but we are committing grievous sins against the Lord every day, and that path is marked all along with judgment after judgment. What people need is the teaching of the Beatitudes. Christian people need this, too. And those who profess to be Christians, but have never been changed in heart, need the Beatitudes also to wake them up. We need to humble ourselves before God. We need to realize that we are guilty before God. And we need to look to Him for His blessing which can only be ours when we are, and when we are doing, what pleases Him. Our country stands in great need of the Gospel! And if we won't listen to the Gospel, and the implications of the Gospel, our destruction may be nearer than any of us realizes. Let us pay attention, close attention, to each one of these

Beatitudes, and make sure that we are walking the path which leads to true happiness in God and in His Son.

But now let us look at our Beatitude for today: **“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled” (Matt. 5:6).**

Let me mention first of all that our Lord was speaking about:

I. TWO OF THE STRONGEST DESIRES WE HAVE (Matt. 5:6a).

These two desires are the desire for food, and the desire for water. When the Lord created Adam and Eve, He placed them in a Garden where they had plenty of food to eat, and plenty of water to drink. We read in the latter part of the book of Genesis that God brought a famine in the land, and that lack of food was the reason that Jacob and his family moved down to Egypt. When you read the story of the journey of the children of Israel from Egypt to Canaan, they were always worried about what they were going to eat, and where they could find water to drink. And we all know, or should know, how God provided for them.

One of the first things that we do every day when we get up, is to have breakfast. And then we look forward to lunch, and later to dinner, plus the snacks that we have during the day. And we are continually drinking water. We need food to satisfy our hunger, and we need water to satisfy our thirst. But this is all on the physical side.

Not until our spiritually blinded eyes are opened by the Lord do we realize that we also have even greater needs than the needs of our bodies. Those other needs are the needs of our souls. We are not just body; we are body and soul and spirit. We have physical needs, but we also have spiritual needs. And our spiritual needs are the greatest because the satisfaction of our spiritual needs will determine where we are going to spend eternity. Our Lord said,

36 For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?

37 Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Mark 8:36-37).

Now this is what our Lord was talking about when He spoke of *hungering and thirsting after righteousness*. He was indicating that when a person has the same kind of desire for righteousness that he does for food and drink, that is when he is going to find true happiness.

When the Devil tempted the Lord to turn stones into bread after the Lord had gone without food for forty days and nights, this is how the Lord answered him:

It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4).

Job hungered and thirsted for righteousness, and he indicated as much when he said,

Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food (Job 23:12).

Can you say that from the heart? How many people do you know who can say that? Job meant that if on a certain day he was in a time frame where he only had time to eat dinner, or to read his Bible (as we would say), he would choose to read his Bible.

David expressed it this way:

How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth! (Psa. 119:103).

Jeremiah likened the Word to food when he wrote:

Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts (Jer. 15:16).

But now let me ask and answer the question:

II. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HUNGER AND THIRST AFTER RIGHTEOUSNESS?

From all that I have said up to this point we can say that:

A. It means to hunger and thirst for the Bible.

One of the first signs that a person has really been saved, is that he has a desire to know and understand the Scriptures. He wants to read it. He goes where others can teach him. He will memorize it. He likes to talk about it, and he reads books which help him to understand the Word. The Apostle Peter was speaking of hungering and thirsting after righteousness when he wrote this to Jewish Christians in the first century:

2 As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:

3 If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious (1 Pet.

2:2-3).

Let me state it this way: The Bible is our handbook on righteousness. It is there that we learn of our righteous God. The Bible shows us that what we need is righteousness, that by nature we are unrighteous. The Bible is a book which deals with history and prophecy, but it is more than a book on history and prophecy. It is a book which deals with many wonderful doctrines, but it is more than a Book on doctrine. The Bible is God's Book. It came from Him, and it tells us about Him. And it is in seeing God in history and in prophecy and in doctrine that the Bible comes to life. And it is always true that the more we know about the Bible, the more we want to know. The Bible sets before us the great doctrine of the righteousness of God. So to hunger and thirst for righteousness is to hunger for the knowledge of the Word that we may come to a greater understanding of God.

But there is a second thing that hungering and thirsting for righteousness means.

B. It means to hunger and thirst for Christ.

It is in reading the Bible and learning about the righteousness of God, that we also learn that we can only come to know this great and glorious God through His Son, Whom the Apostle John called, "Jesus Christ, the righteous" (1 John 2:1).

The Apostle Paul said this about Christ in 2 Cor. 5:21. Let me read it to you as it is given in the NKJ:

For He [God] made Him [Christ] Who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

This is justification when on the basis of Christ becoming sin for us, God declares us to be righteous in His sight. The Lord took our place on the Cross in order that we, who believe in Him, might be righteous before God.

And once we know the Lord, then we want to learn all that we can about Him. We marvel at the love of God in sending such a One as His Son to die for guilty, unworthy, defiled sinners such as we are. And a great part of learning how poor we are in spirit, is in learning about our precious Savior. We begin to see Christ all through the Scriptures. We would love to have been with those two disciples on the road to Emmaus when it is said of the Lord,

And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto

them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself (Luke 24:27).

The Bible tells us about God, the righteous God, but it also tells us about “Jesus Christ, the righteous [One].”

But there is one other point I need to make before I close. And it is this:

C. To hunger and thirst for righteousness is to have a strong desire to be like the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is why we have been saved. Any person can learn about Christ, and not want to be like Him, is not truly a Christian. And to be like Christ means not just to be like Him outwardly, but to be like Him inwardly, in the heart. What joy this brings! When we are conscious that the Lord has not only saved us from the penalty we were under, but that He is changing us from what we used to be, to become more and more like He is, there is no greater joy than that. That is true blessedness!

The Beatitudes teach us what we are without Christ. Then by the grace of God we mourn before God because of our sins. And we start to become like the Lord in His meekness and lowliness and gentleness. But as this work goes on in our hearts by the grace of God, we find ourselves hungering and thirsting, greatly desiring to be more like the Lord every day that we live.

Finally, as with the other Beatitudes,

III. WE HAVE A PROMISE: “For they shall be filled.”

I like the way it is translated in the NASB: “For they shall be satisfied.” If there is one word which does NOT describe most people, and even many Christians, it is the word “satisfied.” People generally are not only dissatisfied, but *very dissatisfied*. They are always looking to this or that for happiness, but while they may enjoy a certain thing for a while, a new home, a new car, a better job with more pay, yet nothing really satisfies the human soul but the Word of God, and God Himself, and our Lord, and the blessings of the Christian life, walking with the Lord, becoming like our Lord, through the power and blessing of the Holy Spirit. How tragic it is that we don’t really believe this.

Early in my ministry during my student days, I worked in Young Life with a friend whose name was George Sheffer. He was married and had two little children. But he became very sick, and the doctors told him that he

did not have long to live. You can imagine how devastated he was when he got that news. He would be leaving his wife behind, and his children, even though he would soon be with the Lord. But it happened, as it sometimes does, that the original diagnosis was not correct, and after several weeks or months (I have forgotten now how long it was), George regained his health, finished school, and went on to a very fruitful ministry with young people. But one day I heard him speak to a group of young people after all of this had taken place, and he said this: “You never know that Jesus Christ alone is enough until you have everything but Jesus Christ taken away from you.”

That is what our Lord was speaking about. “Jesus Christ, the righteous One,” is enough. He alone can bring true happiness, true satisfaction in our lives. And the more we hunger and thirst for Him, and to be like Him, the greater our satisfaction will be!

Concl: It is obvious that God alone can give us such a hunger and such a thirst for the Word, and for the God of the Word, and for the Lord Jesus Christ, and, finally, to become like the Lord Jesus Christ. But we all need to ask ourselves if our desire for the Word, and for God, and for Christ, and to become like Christ, is like a hungry and thirsty man? Do we look forward to reading the Word? Is it the high point of our day? Do we read the Word as Oswald Chambers used to say, “as a man looking for His Lord”? Do we pray for a great likeness of Christ in our lives? Oh, the joy that will be ours when we truly hunger and thirst after righteousness! May the Lord increase our desire for the Lord until it can only be described as hungering and thirsting!