

# The Beatitudes

*“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled”  
Matthew 5:6*

*“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”  
2 Corinthians 3:18*

## **Hungering and Thirsting for Righteousness**

**June 23, 2024**

**Matthew 5:6**

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### **Introduction:**

Good morning church! Open your Bibles to Matthew Chapter 5. We continue in our study of the beatitudes. Through the past weeks we have heard Scott preach about the inverted values of Christ. The beatitudes teach us what Christian living looks like. What approved and commended people look like. And boy o boy is it different than the happiness and approval the world is chasing. We are learning how the narrow path of the good life actually goes through the forest of being poor in Spirit – living humbly and contritely. The way continues through the valley of mourning over sin, and crosses the bridge being meek and not self-asserting. This is the path of blessing. This is the road to happiness.

This week we encounter another sign post on the narrow road to true blessing in Christ, the mark of Hunger and Thirsting for Righteousness. Read with me aloud:

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who Hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.”

Matthew 5:1-6 ESV

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

As Scott has mentioned in weeks past, each Beatitude follows a logical progression based on the previous. Being Poor in spirit leads to recognizing our need of God and makes us willing to submit to God's Word and Ways – which in turn makes us mourn over sin. This encourages us to be meek, humble and willing to not assert ourselves and instead wait on the Lord to bring Justice! Our beatitude today flows out of the first three, namely being poor in spirit, mourning over sin, becoming meek **CREATE A HUNGER AND THIRST FOR DOING THINGS GOD'S WAY**. As always, Martyn Lloyd Jones says it so well:

“It also means of necessity a desire to be free from the power of sin. Having realized what it means to be poor in spirit and to mourn because of sin within, we naturally come to the stage of longing to be free from the power of sin”<sup>1</sup>

The road map for our time together is going to be pretty simple. We will be asking 3 questions:

- 1) What is righteousness?
- 2) What does it mean to hunger and thirst for it?
- 3) What does it mean to be Satisfied?

## **What is Righteousness?**

Righteousness in the Bible has a broad semantic range. It can mean right action, or right relationship or even be used in the sense of justification – legal right standing before God. As usual, Paul Carter has a really good way of thinking about it, separating it into two directions and aspects.<sup>2</sup> Righteousness exists in vertical dimension in right relationship with God, and horizontally with other people. So will go through those ideas starting in the vertical dimension and ask the question:

### **1. What is Positional Righteousness?**

Positional righteousness has to do with a right relationship with God. It comes from our position in Christ. It's what classical theologians call Imputed Righteousness. It is the perfection that is

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<sup>1</sup> Studies in the Sermon on the Mount. Martyn Lloyd Jones pg. 65

<sup>2</sup> Paul Carter. Personal communication

imputed or pressed into us by the perfect life and death of Jesus. It's not about what we do, but about what Jesus did. For the children, we use the analogy of Christ removing our defiled sin-soaked garments and replacing them with his own clean sin free clothing. This is what Paul talks about in almost all of his letters but is summarized nicely in Philippians:

in order that I may gain Christ 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.* Philippians 3:9 ESV

Positional righteousness is the righteousness that saves us. And here we see one of the marks of the true Christian. Longing, hungering, thirsting for the righteousness that comes freely as grace from the Lord Jesus Christ that saves us from our sins! This really is the Gospel! Positional righteousness is the free gift of God through Christ that saves us from our sins, and ultimately saves us from hell! There is Blessing attached to hungering for the Righteousness of Christ to cover you!

I'd like to lean in here to folks that are checking out Christianity and Church. Looking at the world, you know things are not as they should be. Think about Gaza. Think about Ukraine, or Congo. You KNOW there is such thing as evil. And you KNOW there is such thing as a GOOD GOD. And inside you feel the tug to be "good". But if we honestly looking inside our own hearts, we can see something is broken there too, and unfortunately the temptation to do selfish things that benefit us and harm others is too hard to consistently resist. That my friend is sin, and even the best of us fall to it. The President Woodrow Wilson, hailed as a great reformer and champion of social justice internationally, was a segregationist and his name has been removed from Princeton due to accusations of racism. Johnathan Edwards, a great English theologian owned slaves. And Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was unfaithful to his wife.<sup>3</sup> All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). But this is the good news of the Gospel, though none of us are perfect, we can become perfect positionally through Jesus. That's why Romans 3:23 doesn't end with declaring that all have sinned. Listen to the whole verse:

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified [made righteous] by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Romans 3:23-24

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/how-do-i-process-the-moral-failures-of-my-historical-heroes>

If we turn away from our sin, and turn towards Jesus in faith, his perfect life covers ours, his sacrificial death pays for our sins – past present and future. This is the Gospel!

So, coming back to our text today, the question is: ARE YOU HUNGERING FOR FORGIVENESS OF YOUR PERSONAL SINS, for positional righteousness? Are you THIRSTING to be made right with God? If you don't call yourself a Christian and you do, then come! Come to Jesus! Don't delay any longer! You can be SATISFIED! He has the power to forgive, He has the power to heal! He injects His righteousness into us so we are right with God. So if you know you are a sin sick sinner, here is the medicine for your malady! Christ's righteousness!

Next, we need to appreciate what our role is in Righteousness.

## 2. What is Personal Righteousness?

The kind of Righteousness Jesus is describing ALSO requires human effort and a change in behaviour. Being in relationship with God is his free gift, we don't earn that. But that does not mean a free gift comes without obligations. Listen to how one expositor defines it:

Righteousness in Matthew is not so much 'being good', still less legal correctness, but rather a synonym for the Christian life, viewed as a **relationship with God focused in obedience**.<sup>4</sup>

This vertical dimension, proceeds upwards towards **a relationship with God based in obedience**. Given the moral teachings that follow in the sermon on the Mount it is impossible not to see this! There is a right way to live, a life that pleases God, and blessed are those that hunger for it. Look at the content of the Sermon on the Mount that follows this beatitude. Being a city on a hill, doing good works in secret – not to be seen by men, praying and fasting rightly to God – not to get credit with men, serving God – not money, trusting God – not being anxious; all are commands that speak to right relationship with God.

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<sup>4</sup> Tyndale New Testament Commentary MATTHEW. An Introduction and Commentary. R. T. France. 1985.

Notice what Righteousness is not. It's not merely "doing good things". Later on Jesus warns about the hypocrisy of "good behaviour" that doesn't include a heart change, and a motivational alignment with God.

Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. Matthew 6:1

Jesus is warning about the futility of surface only behaviour without the substantive Heart change. Listen to what Martyn Lloyd Jones says with respect to this beatitude:

To hunger and thirst after righteousness is nothing but the longing to be positively holy. I cannot think of a better way of defining it. The man who hungers and thirsts after righteousness is the man who wants to exemplify the beatitudes in his daily life. He is the man who wants to show the fruit of the Spirit in his every action and in the whole of his life and activity...It means that one's supreme desire in life is to know God and to be in fellowship with Him.<sup>5</sup>

To exemplify the beatitudes everyday – To show the fruit of the Spirit in every action – Flowing out of a supreme desire to know God and to have fellowship with him. To hunger to know God and be in fellowship with him through obedience. If you can only remember one thing today, that just might be it!

But there is also a horizontal element to Personal Righteousness as Lloyd Jones implies. It includes being in RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER PEOPLE. And again, it not just doing the right things on the outside, behaving well; it's deep character change. Think about the Fruits of the Spirit, many make no sense without the horizontal dimension – relating to others – Love, peace with others, patience with others, kindness to others, gentleness with others. Or again consider what follows this beatitude in the Sermon on the Mount. So much of it is about horizontal relationships! Jesus's commands about Anger, Lust, Divorce, Truth telling, Revenge, Loving your enemies, Forgiving, Judging others, and the Golden Rule. All of these have to do with horizontal relationships – Right Relationship with others. We might call this Societal Righteousness.

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<sup>5</sup> Studies in the Sermon on the Mount. Martyn Lloyd Jones pg. 66.

In this beatitude, Christ is directing us to hunger and thirst for a remade creation, and a remade society. This beatitude moves us beyond the necessary mourning over the brokenness of sin in us and in the world referred to by the second beatitude, to a longing and hunger for the better things to come. Mourning is the necessary feeling that comes before a true wetting of the appetite for something greater. And that something greater is my heart and your heart changed, AND A SOCIETY cleansed from all injustice and oppression.

Where the second beatitude says, IF you are not mourning over the sin and brokenness of society, you simply can't be a Christian; This one says, the mark of a true Christian is hungering and thirsting for the perfect horizontal justice with other people.

What needs to be emphasized here is, that kind of Righteousness, perfect Societal Righteousness, perfect Personal righteousness is not possible on our own. It takes equipping Grace from God. Consider what the Apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:18:

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. 2 Corinthians 3:18

Did you catch that? One degree of glory to the next – it's a process. Unlike Positional Righteousness that is instant and a one-handed work of God, Personal and Societal Righteousness takes time AND equipping by the Holy Spirit! Read again, “for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”

AND also takes human effort. This is what theologians call a two-handed work, and we will touch more on that in a minute. For now, listen to the same Apostle Paul addressing his protégé Timothy about human responsibility:

So flee youthful passions and *pursue righteousness*, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. 2 Timothy 2:22

Pursuit. Paul says we have to be chasing it. Jesus says we have to be hungry for it! Exemplifying the beatitudes daily, showing the Fruits of the Spirit in every action that's the object of our appetite. So the question need to answer is:

## What does it mean to Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness?

We don't have to look very far back in the book of Matthew to see the sense of the word in Matthew 4:1-2:

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. Matthew 4:1-2

Has anyone here fasted before? What was it like? How often did you think of food? Daily? Hourly? EVERY MINUTE!?! More like every minute if you like food as much as I do! That boring drilling feeling in your stomach. That aching reminder intruding into your thoughts. This is not the incipient hunger of missing a mere meal, but the consuming hunger of a prolonged fast. It means you have developed a taste for the things of God. A taste for “doing right” by Him and “doing right” by others – according to God’s rules!

Practically speaking what does this hungering for righteousness look like? On the personal level it looks like hunting down and killing sin in your life. Sins against God (vertical), and sins against others (horizontal). Levi has quoted John Owen before when he says:

Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you! John Owen

That quote is from John Owens’ famous sermon “The Mortification of Sin”<sup>6</sup> in which he really explains just one verse Roman 8:13:

For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. Romans 8:13

I'd like to point out just 2 of Owen's many observations from this verse:

- 1) The duty to kill sin falls on YOU.
- 2) You kill sin by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit

You have to do the hard work. It takes your effort! Owen points out:

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.modernpuritans.com/mortification-of-sin-john-owen/> accessed June 19, 2024.

The most devoted believers, who are undoubtedly freed from the condemning power of sin, should still make it their business throughout their lives to overcome the indwelling power of sin. John Owen

Hear that. Your positional righteousness, Christ's work, overcomes the **condemning power of sin**. Christ removes the condemnation of sin. That's God's Hand. BUT believers must make it their business to overcome the **indwelling power of sin** – that is – pursue personal righteousness – That's your Hand. See why sanctification or pursuit of Righteousness is a 2 Handed work.

Paul says it this way:

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, **I worked harder than any of them**, though it was **not I, but the grace of God that is with me**. 1 Corinthians 15:10

Now with so many things there are two ditches here. Back in Owen's day he was more concerned about works based righteousness. This ditch is the Roman Catholic one implying it's all human effort to be sanctified. Listen to his warning:

Overcoming sin using our own strength, carried out by self-invented ways, aiming for self-righteousness, is the heart and substance of all false religion in the world. John Owen

A deep ditch to be sure. This can lead to spiritual arrogance as Owen implies, and it robs God of glory, because we take the credit for our salvation. But doing it in our own strength can also lead to intense discouragement in the face of an impossible task. So don't do it in your own strength! We have a HELPER! That is so encouraging when battling personal sin. Praise God there are two hands! Pastor Levi has used this illustration before. It's like when pushing up a chest press bar. We push, and the Spirit helps. But we gotta push. And the Spirit helps, But we gotta push!

Thinking we become righteous on own effort alone is a very dangerous ditch for sure. But I think in our day the more prevalent ditch is the "let go and let God ditch" that says it's all Grace and no exertion on the road to sanctification. This leads to a lazy, flat and ultimately un-salty church which maligns God because it looks no different from the world. There's no pushing up on the bar. Listen Brothers and Sisters, the Spirit will meet us in proportion to our effort. Little effort, expect little help! Friends, do not quench the Spirit's work in you by losing your thirst for Righteousness! As one of my kids says: "lock in". Cultivate Hunger. Cultivate Thirst. Pray

thy Kingdom Come – in me! Pray Thy Kingdom Come – In the World!. Lament. Do you feel the world is broken? That’s pretty easy to see.

Now, Do you feel that you are broken? That’s harder. You see cultivating Hunger involves deep introspection, and accurate self-assessment. Seeing where you are falling short. Cultivating hunger involves allowing others into your life who will ask hard questions and lovingly revealing sin and pointing you to Jesus. Do you have that? Times of confession? A brother or sister who can call you out where you are short? You see, HUNGER AND THIRSTING COME FROM AN AWARENESS OF LACK.

And as you cultivate Hunger, be sure you don’t sate yourself on lesser things! Brothers and Sisters, you won’t be hungry for the righteousness we’ve been talking about if your belly is filled with the world. John says: “Little Children keep yourself from Idols!” 1 John 5:12. Chasing career, longevity, material possessions, or just plain fun or “happiness” will do precisely that. Any idol will blunt your hunger and thirst. And it is precisely HUNGERING and THIRSTING Jesus is talking about here.

It’s THE HUNGERING AND THIRSTING this beatitude in commending The awareness of Lack and longing for filling. Scott reminded me of this in the editing process, that it’s important to see the blessing is attached to the longing for righteousness. One commentator summarizes this way:

The emphasis is not on the achievement or current possession of righteousness, but the whole-hearted longing for it<sup>7</sup>

That is where the blessing is found in THE LONGING, THE HUNGERING, because this longing will be satisfied! Just how we are satisfied is what we turn our attention to now.

### **What does it mean to be Satisfied?**

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas Tehan and David Abernathy. An exegetical Summary of the Sermon on the Mount. SIL international. 2009. Accessed through Olive Tree Bible Software.

The word used by Matthew to describe being Satisfied implies to have ONE'S FILL or be contented. It's stomach language. The NKJV and NIV say "for they will be filled". Just what are we talking about with this idea of being Satisfied. I'd like to zoom in on just three ways we are satisfied.

## **1. We are satisfied by a good life now**

The first sense in which we are satisfied in this life comes about for the simple reason, God's ways are right and lead to life! Doing things God's way leads to blessing in the here and now. For example, think about how God's commands on the exclusivity of sex and marriage satisfies. It satisfies the human need for connection and trust through monogamy. It satisfies children's need for safety, consistency, and love by being the necessary stable shelter for them. Or think about how the counter cultural command to serve others satisfies compares to the culture of consumption we have in the west. Which do you think brings lasting joy? Ask the guy who has the most toys on his death bed – Are you really satisfied? Are you really fulfilled? His answer will be no!

Secondly

## **2. We are satisfied by the Holy Spirit's filling**

We are FILLED with the Holy Spirit to obtain imperfectly, personal righteousness here and now. One may even say, "Happy are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled with the Holy Spirit to do righteousness!" Hunger and thirst are not satisfied till they are met. And the Spirit helps us to meet that righteousness in this life! Consider the RCC statement of Faith on sanctification:

[Christians] are also further sanctified, really and personally, through the same virtue, **by His Word and Spirit dwelling in them.** This sanctification is progressive through the supply of Divine strength, which all saints seek to obtain, pressing after a heavenly life in cordial obedience to all Christ's commands.  
Redeemer City Church, Orillia Statement of Faith

Aren't you thankful God meets our pressing in with fresh supplies of the Spirit to move in us and change us to be more and more like Christ in this life!? And the amazing thing about this hunger and thirsting it is paradoxically satisfied and then made more intense. I hate to quote him again, but I must!

The Christian is one who at one and the same time is hungering and thirsting, and yet he is filled. The more he is filled the more he hungers and thirsts. That is the blessedness of this Christian life. It goes on. You reach a certain stage in sanctification, but you do not rest upon that for the rest of your life. You go on changing from glory into glory!<sup>8</sup>

Brothers and sisters, that is the test of a Christians personal walk. If you lost your desire to become more and more like Christ you are in grave spiritual danger. If you are content to say, I've grown enough in patience, I don't need to grow more, you are in trouble. The question you want to ask yourself is: Am I hungering, but then being satisfied – that is growing in righteousness and being filled with the Spirit, AND THEN still hungering again and thirsting again for greater and greater sanctification? Are you Ever hungry, ever filled! If you are, that is a very good sign.

Thirdly,

### **3. We will be fully satisfied in the Age to Come**

One day the hunger and thirst for right relationship with God and fellow man will be completely satisfied, but only in the age to come. Jesus clearly has that in mind too. RT France says about this beatitude:

the ultimate satisfaction of a relationship with God unclouded by disobedience is chiefly in view.<sup>9</sup>

A real Christian will always remain hungry till every last atom of imperfection and sinful pollution is forcibly expelled from their being. And this can only happen in the remaking of the world and the resurrection of the dead. That is what Paul is driving at when he says in 1 Corinthians 15:42-44:

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<sup>8</sup> Studies in the Sermon on the Mount. Martyn Lloyd Jones pg. 70

<sup>9</sup> Tyndale NT commentary on Matthew. RT France. Accessed through Olive Tree Bible software.

So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. 1 Corinthians 15:42-44

Or similarly the apostle John:

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.  
1 John 3:2

In the Resurrection we will finally be what has not yet appeared, COMPLETELY RIGHTEOUS like Him, Jesus. Raised in power. Raised to Glory. Without spot, blemish or weakness.

But not just us. Our culture, human society will also be made perfect under the Lordship of the Lamb! And more than that even, creation itself! Listen to what the Apostle Paul says:

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. Romans 8:19-21 ESV

Amen to that! This is what really excites me! A remade creation without sin. Populated by people who can't sin. You do know WE ARE THOSE SONS AND DAUGHTERS that creation is waiting to see revealed. Revealed in sinless perfect righteousness that we have hungered and thirsted for in this life. Revealed to a creation having been cleansed by the atoning, saving and sanctifying work of God in us. Saved to sin no more in a creation where:

God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away... for behold I am making all things new! Revelation 21:3b-5a ESV

I alluded to this song before already, but it really does get at the hunger pangs creation feels presently and the pains we ought to feel too!

Do you feel the world is broken? Do you feel the shadows deepen? Do you know there's a light of righteousness that will keep the dark from ever breaking through?

Do you hunger and thirst to see all things made new?

And I think that's where I'd like to end today.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.  
Matthew 5:6 NKJV

For if we hunger, we are Blessed to have Positional Righteousness, filled by Christ's  
Righteousness

If we thirst, we are Blessed to grow in Personal Righteousness, filled by His Spirit

AND If we hunger and thirst we are Blessed because we will be satisfied by the sure promise  
fulfilled of Ultimate Righteousness in the coming Kingdom of Heaven.

Stay Hungry and Thirsty Brother and Sisters, for the Day when he returns

The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come!" Revelation 22:17a ESV

Amen