

Hunger for Righteousness?

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Date: 31 July 2022

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- [0 : 0 0] If you would, if you could please turn with me to Matthew chapter five. We're continuing our study in the Beatitudes, which is the very beginning of the Sermon of the Mount, which runs from chapters five all the way through seven.
- And Corey began this series by looking at the Beatitudes as a whole in the past few weeks we were looking at them just one by one coming this time to the fourth Beatitude.
- And as we consider the message, we need to keep in mind the context. And to see the context, we need to be mindful of the Old Testament. So the Gospel of Corinne of Matthew seems to have been written to a predominantly, although not, you know, primarily, you know, exclusively Jewish audience, you know, an audience that would be familiar with the Old Testament.
- And we see here in verse one of chapter five, Jesus going up on a mountain. And with the disciples being near him and the crowds then being at the base of the mountain.
- And we see a similarity of this in the book of Exodus, as we see how Moses comes up on the mountain to meet with God. And we see the leaders of Israel being just a little further down and then with the rest of the people at the base of the mountain.
- [1 : 2 0] And here in Matthew, we see the picture of Jesus here. You know, as a Moses-like figure who is on the mountain to get and to deliver the word of God to the people.
- But there's a big difference, isn't there? Because Jesus is fully God and fully man. He is thus both Moses and God.
- He is the greater Moses. And when Jesus speaks, he's speaking to us as God. And the crowds, they notice this difference.
- As you see at the very end of the Sermon of the Mount in chapter seven, you know, they say that Jesus was teaching them as one who had authority and not like one of the scribes.
- See Jesus is the God-man who comes and brings the word of God directly without an intermediary, without someone that is between the people and God.
- [2 : 1 9] And in his message in the Sermon of the Mount and in the Beatitudes, we're not told, live like this and then you'll become Christians. Rather, we're told, because you're Christians, live like this.
- And to continue with the connection to the book of Exodus, what is the giving of the law like? You know, what do we see? Well, in the decalogue, in the giving of the Ten Commandments, the law that was given did not say, you know, live like this and you will become my people.
- You know, live like this and I will save you. Instead what do we see God say right before the First Commandment? He says, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt out of the house of slavery.
- You see, the preamble to the Ten Commandments is that God has saved them, that he has brought them out of Egypt, delivered them from slavery.

And now, in light of this glorious redemption, live like this. And thus, God gives the Ten Commandments.

[3 : 32] So when we approach the Sermon on the Mount, we do so as God's covenant people. We do so as those whom God has saved as he has brought us out of slavery.

And now that we no longer belong to the kingdom of Satan, but to the kingdom of God, this here in the Beatitudes is what our life should look like. Now, does this not mean that it's a message just for the Christians?

It's not a message just for God's people. Because at the same time when the law was given, yes, it was given for a sense of telling the people what the life as God's people looks like, but it was also given as a way to show people their sin, as a way to show people their need for a Savior.

And at a similar manner, we can come to the Sermon of the Mount and to the Beatitudes and see our need, and to see our need.

Now enough of an introduction. Let's get into the text. And before we do so, please pray with me.

[4 : 46] Father God, your servants are listening. So we pray this evening that you may speak.

We pray that there may not be, it's the words of man, but Lord, the words of God, your words to us this evening.

So Father, speak to us. We pray by your spirit. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

So we will read from Matthew 5 beginning in verse 1. This is the word of God.

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 he taught them, saying, blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

[5 : 49] 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 shall be satisfied. Amen. And that's Mark's reading, God's word.

Now Martin Lloyd-Jones, one of the most famous preachers of the last century, when preaching on the Beatitudes said that the heart of humanity's problem is sin, and if everyone hungered and thirsted after righteousness, there'd be no danger of war.

Now, this may seem a bit simplistic, doesn't it? But each problem on earth can in one way or another be traced to sin.

And the solution is in one way to hunger and thirst for righteousness, not that this would fix all problems, even the holiest of Christians still sins, but this yearning is what is so desperately needed.

[7 : 01] Now, do you recognize this picture of painted? Picture this with me. You're in the grocery store with your child, or if you don't have children, let's say you have one of my children with you, and the child wants something.

And maybe it's one of those pet-buck-pig-shaped cookies at the perfect eye level for a child. And the child, of course, wants the cookie.

And you say, no, you don't need the cookie. And the child starts screaming. In that moment, as the child is screaming and everyone is looking at you, what is the problem?

What is the problem? Is the problem the child's screaming? Or is there something else? Is there another problem? To me, in that specific moment, the problem is that it's my child's screaming, and I'll do whatever it takes to stop the screaming.

You want a cookie? How about two of them? Anything to get people to stop looking at us? The actual problem and the actual solution has not dawned on me in that moment.

[8 : 19] See, it is my child's heart. It is their sin that is at the root of the issue. And what they need more than anything is Jesus.

What they need more than anything is the gospel. What they need is to hunger and to thirst for righteousness. So again, that question is before us.

Do we hunger and thirst for righteousness? Do you hunger and thirst for righteousness? Because Jesus tells us here that satisfaction awaits the seeker.

That satisfaction awaits the seeker. And there are two things that we will look at this evening. The first is the seeker, and the second thing is the satisfaction.

So let us begin by considering the seeker. We see the text say, the blessed are those who hunger and thirst.

[9 : 25] To hunger and thirst means to recognize our need. Of how each one of us recognizes that we need to have something to eat and we need to drink.

Those are things I don't think I have to convince you of this evening. But if we don't eat and we don't drink, we will die. But when we use hunger and thirst in a different way, in the way that we see Jesus use it, then suddenly it becomes a little bit more difficult, doesn't it?

For when I tell you that you need earthly bread and heavenly bread, well, you may agree about the first part, but not maybe the second part.

And that's actually what we see in John 6. In the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus has taken just a few loaves of bread, a few fish, and he has multiplied them enough to feed 5,000.

And then Jesus leaves the crowds, and he goes off by himself. But the crowd, they're not done with Jesus. They pursue him, and the next day they find him.

[10 : 32] And Jesus says that you have come, you have sought me out, not because of the power they saw, not because they want Jesus, but because they want more bread.

They want more bread than they have been given. See, they recognize the need for bread. They did not recognize the need for the bread of life.

They did not recognize their need of a savior, the need for Jesus. Now in this beatitude, blessed is the one who hungers and thirsts for righteousness.

Blessed is the one who in a sense knows their need, who lacks a false sense of self-reliance, who does not believe the lie that they can be self-made.

Arnold Schwarzenegger in a speech that he gave at a commencement ceremony some years ago said, you can call me whatever you want. Arnold Schwarzenegger, Arnie, the Austrian oak, but never call me a self-made man.

[11 : 46] You never call me that. And then he lists the many ways that people have helped him throughout his life and throughout his career. And now we can take this statement, this truth, and take it one step further in that we are indeed relying on other people in life here on earth.

But to a greater extent, we are relying most of all on God himself. We have a great need, and he is the one that we need.

And do you sense this need this evening? The Psalmist says, as the deer pants for streams of water, so pants my soul for you, oh God.

It's a beautiful imagery, beautiful picture of what is being portrayed here. And the question that is before us is, is this the yearning of our heart?

And as we move on and to see what the yearning is for, we see that it is for righteousness, the hunger and thirst for righteousness. And elsewhere, we see Jesus say, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

[13 : 12] Now we may see the great value in light of that, to seek righteousness. How do you become a better spouse? There are many practical things that you can do to become one, to think of ways you can serve your spouse, to work on your listening skills, to carry out what you promise to do, taking out the trash on time.

But in another way, how do you become a better spouse? Seek first the kingdom and his righteousness, hunger and thirst for righteousness.

How do you become a better son, a better daughter? Seek the kingdom. How do you become a better friend, hunger and thirst for righteousness? Now these, though these are all good, should not be the reason that we seek righteousness.

There should not be the reason for that. Because we see in Psalm 1 that blessed it is the man whose delight is in the law of the Lord and who meditates on it day and night.

That's the same word, blessed as we have here. Blessed is the one who delights in the word of God. And this delight is in the word because of whose word it is.

[14 : 34] It is a delight of God himself, of yearning for him, of seeking him. And elsewhere in the Psalms we see it say, I have stored up your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

So how do you store up God's word in your heart by reading it, by meditating on it, by delighting in it? Because you hunger and thirst for God, for his kingdom, for righteousness.

It is a matter of diet. Is it not as we hunger and thirst, what do we hunger and thirst for? What do we seek to fill ourselves with?

Now in hungering and thirsting for righteousness, in seeking first the kingdom, what you seek is Jesus. What you seek is to be conformed into the image of the Son.

What you seek is for the Holy Spirit to work mightily in your heart, which you yourself are unable to do.

[15 : 46] And another place in Matthew, when Jesus speaks of the difficulty of entering into the kingdom of God, the disciples say, then who can be saved? Who can be saved?

And Jesus replies that with man, this is impossible, but with God, all things are possible.

And we can apply the same here. This mighty work with man, this is impossible to be the man or woman perfectly embodying these beatitudes. It's not possible, but with God, he is able to do a mighty work, a mighty transformation of forming work in your life.

So that as time goes on, a reflection of these become brighter and brighter in your life.

And the words that we read from Isaiah earlier, they're words this evening from your Savior. Do you thirst? Come.

[16 : 53] Do you have no money? Well, it does not matter. Just come. You'll listen to Jesus. You eat what is truly good. Why do you spend your money and labor for those things that will not satisfy?

Jesus is the bread of life. Whoever comes to me, Jesus says, they shall not hunger. They shall not thirst.

So what do you hunger and thirst for this evening? See, to yearn for righteousness is not only a desire to not be sinful, but it is also a desire to be holy, to be like God, to love the things that he loves, to really want to embody the fruit of the Spirit.

But Sebastian, you may say, who does not want to embody the fruit of the Spirit? Well, there are times in life, is there not, when we have been so wronged that we don't want to be loving?

We don't want to be patient. We don't want to be kind. And that is the flesh in us, the remnants of that old self. Yet the word compels us.

[18 : 17] And the Spirit empowers us to embody this fruit, to hunger and thirst for righteousness, means to yearn to be like Christ.

Even when we are wronged, Christ who suffered the most of wrongs, the worst of them embodied the fruit of the Spirit, embodied the beatitudes.

So the question before us is, how do I become someone who hungers and thirsts for righteousness? And as we've said, it is not a work that we can do alone.

We can't do it by ourselves. We need the Holy Spirit. He needs to do his work in our heart, not just in conversion, not just in that first moment when we step out of darkness into light, when we see things clearly, but indeed each and every day.

That's when we need Him each and every day. But how? Well, by the means of grace, by the means that God has given us, by words, sacrament, and prayer, these are the means of grace that God has given to His church that He has given to us.

[19 : 33] And at the heart of these is communion, is fellowship with God. As Herman Boving says, the essence of the Christian life is fellowship with God.

It is fellowship with the Father as we are one with Him, as He has given Himself completely to us and He loves us and leads us.

It is fellowship with Jesus, the Son, as we are one with Him, if we are in Him and He is with us. It is fellowship with the Holy Spirit as He dwells in us, convicts us of our sin and guides us.

See, this is the essence of the Christian life. It is fellowship with God in the Holy Spirit, through Christ, with the Father.

So we see a satisfaction awaits the seeker. We've looked at the seeker, but now let us consider the satisfaction. See, we see the blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, and we are told that they shall be satisfied.

[20 : 42] Now the verb here is clearly future. It says that they shall be satisfied. It is really connecting us to the second coming of Christ. It is connecting us to the restoration of all things, as we see it in the book of Revelation, but at the same time, this satisfaction is not just a future reality, something that we have to wait for, for with the first coming of Christ, with His accomplished and finished work and His resurrection and ascension, the kingdom of God has arrived.

The kingdom of God is at hand, Jesus said, and the blessings of God, they're here today. We see the theologians call this the already and the not yet.

There are blessings that we already have, but we don't have all of them yet fully. There are things that we have not yet received. So when we consider the satisfaction, we may think of it in really a threefold way, of a past satisfaction, a present, and then finally a future satisfaction.

So let's think in the first of these, the past satisfaction. We think of that that we have already, as Christians, received. And as we consider these three, I want you to keep in mind that these are ones that are connected to righteousness.

For blessed are those, says Jesus, who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied, meaning they will receive the very thing that they hunger for.

[22 : 19] And as we said in the previous section, the thing that they hunger and thirst for is ultimately God himself. It is to be reconciled to him, to no longer be his enemy, to not be a rebel, but to be his child, to hate the things that God hates and to love the things that God loves.

See, these are the things to be conformed to the image of God's Son, Jesus. So as they hunger and as they thirst for righteousness, they do not yearn for righteousness.

For righteousness is sake. That's not the thing that they're ultimately searching for. No, they yearn for righteousness because their greatest desire is God himself.

So here we have received satisfaction in the past, in our justification. So through our faith in Jesus and relying upon him and him alone for our salvation, we have been declared righteous.

We've been declared rights because of his perfect life, because of his terrible death. He has taken upon himself not just our sins, but he has given us his righteousness that becomes ours through faith.

[23 : 47] So in our hungering and in our thirsting for righteousness, we have been satisfied as we are declared righteous. Now this righteousness is illegal righteousness.

God looks at us and he sees the righteous works that Jesus had accomplished, but we're still sinners.

We still sin and break the law, and that leaves us in one sense unsatisfied, doesn't it? We still have a sin problem.

So let's think about the next satisfaction, because alongside and following justification comes what is called sanctification, because not only has the way that God looks at us changed, so he looks at us and he sees the perfect work of Jesus, but we have changed.

We have been transformed. It's not as if God simply declares us righteous and then leaves us in the state that we were in, no for an Ezekiel 36, God promised that we will be given a new heart, a new spirit, so that he would make us able to follow him in obedience and in love.

[25 : 09] Now this is an exciting thing to see in conversion, isn't it? When someone who was knee-deep in sin enslaved to their passion suddenly makes this 180 shift, when you see this change in their life, a new life, a new person, because if anyone is in Christ, he's a new creation.

So the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. And I remember this very thing in my own life a little more than 11 years ago.

And I found myself there having read the scriptures and I believe them that they're true.

They said about God, what they said about me. They said about how helpless I was.

And that's what I felt. I felt helpless. I felt broken, that I was unable to get myself out of this place that I was in.

[26 : 18] And my state, I felt, was very well captured by Charles Wesley. As he says, long mind, prison, spirit, lay fast bound in sin and nature's night.

But then suddenly, suddenly indeed I felt the way that Charles Wesley continues. You know, thine eye diffused a quickening ray.

I woke the dungeon, flamed with light, my chains fell off, and my heart was free.

I rose, I went forth, and I followed thee. See, the Holy Spirit does a great, transforming work in us the moment that we become, that we come to believe the gospel and rest upon Jesus alone for salvation.

But He doesn't stop there. The entire Christian life is one of sanctification, is an ongoing process. We continually feed on the bread of life.

[27 : 28] You know, we say, as in that great hymn, guide me, oh, that great Jehovah. As we say, bread of heaven, you know, feed me now and evermore, evermore.

It's an ongoing reliance on God as He works in us. As we strive toward Him, that we become more and more like Jesus and find our satisfaction in Him.

And then finally, the future, the final satisfaction. Now, as I said, the Christian life is one of sanctification. We will never become perfect of this side of eternity.

Apostle John says, if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. It does not matter how far by God's grace we have come in our sanctification.

We will not reach that great desire of being unable to sin, of always obeying, of always following God until the return of Christ.

[28 : 36] And this is the future satisfaction, which we call glorification, of how Judge Mende will come upon us. And we will stand there before the Lord, and He will look at us, and He will say, before all, that one is righteous.

That one is mine. That one is my child. And all the remnants of our sinful flesh will fall off, and we will be perfect in body and in soul, unable to sin, and we will be fully and truly righteous, and we will be fully and entirely satisfied, not solely because we are fully righteous, but because we, as righteous, receive the fullness of that great desire itself, which is God, which is God Himself.

And this is our great desire. This is our great hope. And we see in Revelation 19 of the marriage supper of the Lamb, and there we will be in the presence of the one that right now we only see by faith, but one day we will see by sight.

And we will be given that robe that's been washed, and we will stand before Him pure and clean, and we will be with God, and it will say there will be no temple in that heavenly city in the New Jerusalem, for God will be in our midst, and we will see Him face to face.

And that is our great treasure. That is our great satisfaction that we look to. So satisfaction we see awaits the seeker.

[30 : 34] So for the Christian, let me ask you, are you satisfied? Are you satisfied? Are you hungering and thirsting?

Do you recognize the glories of the grace that we've talked about of justification, sanctification, and glorification? The question may be asked, how do we know?

How do we know if we hunger and thirst for righteousness? And that's the value, I think, of being introspective. I struggle with this. I'm not very introspective.

It takes me great energy and effort to be introspective, and this is one of the places where I see that God has really blessed me and has really thought through because He's given me a wife who is very introspective and who can show me and guide me in this, setting a great example for me to ponder and to consider.

We can learn much from sitting in solace and in quiet, especially in a busy world like ours, thinking through our thoughts, our actions, our desires, and then ask ourselves this question.

[31 : 46] Martin Lloyd-Jones recommends that we look at Hebrews 11, that we look at these examples of people of God who acted out of their faith that they had.

The final consideration, again, from Lloyd-Jones is to consider avoiding not just the things that are sinful, but even to avoid certain things that are okay.

It is okay to watch Netflix, Disney Plus, or Prime, especially after a long and grueling day. It's okay to catch up on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, but if we're spending much of our time doing that, we crowd out time, attention, effort that could have gone to spiritual things.

We may even begin saying that we're too busy, that we're too busy to read, we're too busy to pray, we're too busy to serve.

We may consider the time that we've spent on the means of grace, of word and prayer, of seeking communion with God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

[33 : 02] Have we let other desires, even good desires, crowd out our desire for God? The problem is not the desires themselves.

God has given us desires. For our good, the problem is when we allow good desires to become the primary desires. The primary one, when we say that we want the gift rather than the giver, when we say that we rather have the gift than the giver.

What is your greatest desire this evening? Is it the great gifts and desires that God has given you out of His grace, or is it rather God Himself?

For the children, those who are here this evening, you may be familiar with the song that I know you've been doing down at Kids' Church. It's actually one of Felicity's favorites at the moment, Jesus' Strong and Kind.

Because I think this song answers this very well. It says, Jesus said that if I thirst, I should come to Him.

[34 : 15] No one else can satisfy. I should come to Him. See, Jesus is the only one that can satisfy what you want, everything that you desire and yearn for.

So you can run to Him. You can run to Him today. You can always run to Him because He showed you on that cross that He will come for you.

And for the non-Christian, the question is, what do you hunger and thirst for? What do you seek your satisfaction in?

Is it a job done well done? Wasn't there always more that you can do? Is it pleasure? Well, that's not enough.

There's always a desire for more. He will go forever wanting, forever longing. Jim Carrey in a speech a few years ago at the Golden Globes, he said, I am two-time Golden Globe winner, Jim Carrey.

[35 : 27] You know, when I go to sleep at night, I'm not just a guy going to sleep. I am two-time Golden Globe winner, Jim Carrey, going to get some well-needed shut eye.

And when I dream, I don't dream any old dream. No, sir, I dream about being three-time Golden Globe winner actor, Jim Carrey, because then I would be enough.

It would finally be true, and I could stop this terrible search for what I know ultimately won't fulfill me.

And Carrey touches here at the heart of the issue. We think that if only we can get a little bit more, a little bit more, if we can achieve one more thing, that will be enough.

We will be satisfied then. Yet the terrible search continues, the striving which has no apparent end.

[36 : 33] Like Augustine said, our hearts are restless, restless until they find their rest in God, in God Himself.

And Bobbinc again, he picks up on this, and he says that the thirst of our heart goes forth primarily for the living God Himself.

And we will find no rest until God becomes our God and our Father. So if you don't this evening, trust in and rest in Jesus alone for salvation.

If you know, and if you recognize this endless search and striving all too well, and you desire something more, something that will last, something that will last, something that is actually worth it, don't wait until tomorrow.

It's easy because there's no work for you to do. There's no amount of righteousness that you have to muster up and achieve because Christ has earned it for you.

[37 : 49] Really confess your sin. Ask for forgiveness and ask that He would not only be God, but that He would be your Father, that He would be yours.

In the words that Jesus spoke to the woman at the well, they're the words to you this evening because everyone who drinks of this water here, this earthly water, they'll be thirsty again.

But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never thirst again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water just welling up to eternal life.

Amen. Let us pray. Oh Father, how we yearn and search for something that is good not just in the moment, not just for today, but for our whole lives and, or indeed for all eternity.

We pray that you may give us this. Give us this great desire. Give us, we ask yourself.

[39 : 17] Father, we pray indeed that the day may come and may it be soon when this life of faith that we live will no longer be a life of faith, but indeed be a life of sight when we see you face to face.

Let me pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.