

Hungering and Thirsting for Righteousness

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[0 : 00] We're going to read from the New Testament, from Matthew, the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 5. So this is the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. So we'll read the first 12 verses, and just as we read, notice verse 6 in particular, because that's where Flynn will focus his time for us tonight.

This is the word of the Lord. Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, Jesus' 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.

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.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you, when others revile you and persecute you, and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

[1 : 17] Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven. For so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. This is God's holy word. Good evening, and if I haven't seen you since the New Year's, Happy New Year's.

I'm Flynn. Like Corey said, I'm the ministry minister apprentice. We're just going to look at the Beatitudes tonight. We're going to look at the sixth verse, hungering and thirsting for righteousness. It's a really important part of a really important text. You're probably familiar with the Beatitudes. You probably already know why they're important. But as we kick off the New Year, I think it's important that we refresh our memory, refresh our understanding of our need for God.

So let's look at what it means to hunger and thirst for righteousness, and what it means to be satisfied. This year, 2025, we're all searching for satisfaction, and we're searching for it in different ways.

But Christ gives us the ultimate one way to satisfaction in this particular verse. So what is satisfaction?

[2 : 27] What does it mean to be satisfied? Satisfaction is spiritual well-being and abiding happiness. This is what we want for 2025, isn't it?

If our spirit is well-oriented, then all of who we are will be well-oriented. So how do we get it? We'll look at the verse, and there's three things I want to point out.

The meaning of blessedness. The second point is learning how to hunger and thirst for righteousness. And the third is finally finding satisfaction. Blessedness.

What is it? In order to see what it means to be satisfied, we need to understand blessedness. The Greek word is makarios.

It's repeated multiple times by Jesus. There's this incredible sense of importance. Makarios is important.

[3 : 24] The word blessed is important because he uses it to speak directly to his whole audience. I think to understand what it means for us, we need to look first at what it means to the Jews who he was preaching to and to the Greeks and the Romans to who he was preaching to.

So what did it mean to God's people, to the Jews? Well, they're God's people. They followed the Old Testament, and they understood it as God's revelation to them, giving them commandments. They were well-versed in wisdom literature. And as we've sang tonight, and as we will see, they would be very familiar with this word because it's used, and it's used many times in the Old

Testament, especially in Psalms and Proverbs.

If I just read now a couple of things. Psalm 31. Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Psalm 34. Taste and see that the Lord is good.

Blessed is he who takes refuge in him. Psalm 41. Blessed is he who considers the poor. In the day of trouble, the Lord considers him. So who is blessed in all of those?

[4 : 37] And who is blessed in Psalm 1? And how? How are they blessed? They're blessed because their transgressions are forgiven, because they consider the poor, because they take refuge in the Lord.

And so what are we noticing here? It's not necessarily the state of salvation. It's not heaven on the horizon. But actually, in all three of these, or four of these particular Psalms, being blessed is being turned.

There's a sense of movement in all of these Psalms. And that movement is to restoration. It's being turned into a right state for God.

He forgives sin. He restores us to him. We taste and see the Lord is good. We've been turned back to him. We consider the poor. We've been turned from living for ourselves to living for others in need. And so this is what the Jews understood, what they understood the word blessed to mean.

And they would have understood what Christ is meaning. He's using the same structure here. He's saying, you will be blessed if you are reconciled. But the interesting thing here is that whilst the Jews recognized that the Old Testament brought them more direction, and these commandments, these statements of blessing, were instructions on how to live, this is Jesus also saying, in the same way I have authority, as the Old Testament.

[6 : 16] And I think that would have been quite controversial. Okay, so now how about the Roman listeners? They also had an understanding of blessing, of makarios. They often thought about what it meant to be blessed. And for them, being blessed was a state of being which the gods enjoyed, or if you were mortal, like that of the gods.

There's no higher state of being. And there's a connotation of being set apart from the rest. And if you're set apart, what are you set apart from? What are the key indicators with which you possess this blessed estate?

It's your position in life. The elite, the powerful, the wealthy, the married, those who had their house in order and had familial ties, those with property and security and abundant food.

To be blessed for a Greek or a Roman was to set about obtaining these things. And so when they heard Jesus speak, they would have been familiar with hearing things like, blessed are the rich, blessed are the powerful, but not, blessed are those who mourn, those who are poor.

So they too would have set up. And so Jesus is using a very intentional word here. And what's the relevance to us? Well, Jesus is speaking to all people in their times, but he's also speaking to all people in all times.

[7 : 40] He's speaking to us in the 21st century. We all want blessing, and we're at the very beginning of 2025, and don't we yearn to be blessed? Every culture in time and place has yearned for this.

And what is blessing? It's the longing to escape the fallen nature of the world. It's the longing for things to be right when they're so clearly wrong.

Are you pursuing pleasure? It is to escape pain. Are you seeking comfort? It is an attempt to experience rest. Are you striving for wealth? It is to protect yourself from the danger and death of the physical world.

So to be blessed is to experience in some way a right relationship with God, despite our surroundings and sinful conditions.

All these other things are only promising to reverse the curse, and they're promising to restore us to the right relationship to the world around us. But we will see that we can't first pursue these things.

[8 : 45] So Christ came to fulfill the wisdom for the Jews, to subvert the wisdom of the Greeks and the Romans. And with our culture, what does he do? Well, we first need to look at what our culture tells us will make us blessed.

The things that make us blessed in our culture, our comfort, our leisure, labor-saving devices, they'll give us rest. The self-help books will increase our productivity, and we can finally make that breakthrough in our careers.

And when we want a breakthrough in our careers, we're trying to find the work which is really meaningful. Like I said, we're trying to find that rest, which really does rest our soul. Are you looking for a romantic relationship to fulfill you?

It's because you are longing for that fullness of relationship which God made you for. But how do you know that these things will bring that promised state of spiritual blessing? How do you know that when you've finally achieved all you want to achieve, when you've got that first-class honors degree with distinction, that the goalposts won't change after that to the graduate scheme, and then the promotion after that?

What will you do when you find that the perfect romantic partner, all your conditions are met, and yet it's not all that you are after? The point here is that if you have everything, but you don't have God, then you are not blessed.

[10:18] If you have nothing, but you have God, then God promises blessing upon you. And notice here the present tense. Blessed are those. This is a state of being here and now, not just salvation on the horizon.

That this is a blessing to us because we are living, God promises us that we can live what we were made to live for.

So to be blessed is to live in right relationship with God. Jesus takes another step for us. In order to get to this, we must first hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Now what does this mean? And what has it got to do with the right relationship with God?

Commentators say our verse, verse 6, is the turning point in the Beatitudes.

That's why I chose it. Beforehand you've got verses of affliction and emptiness, poverty, mourning, meekness. And then our verse, you've got being satisfied, being filled.

[11:23] And after our verse, you've got abundance to the point of overflowing. So you've got mercifulness, pure in heart, peacemakers, and not just peaceful, but this idea of you're so blessed to the point of blessing others around you.

So we have our insufficiency, filling, and then overflowing. This is the center of the passage. This is the bridge that unlocks the Beatitudes for us. So let's look at the phrase, hungering and thirsting. What is the longest that you've gone without food? And how long could you last? You could last a day, you could last a week, and the average time for someone to go without food, the longest time, I should say, is three weeks, until eventually you'll die.

But it's not a normal, it's not three weeks of normal day-to-day life. You're not thriving in this time. You're slowly wasting, you're starving, you're slowly dying.

And drinking, how long could you go without drinking? Here the answer is more like three days. And I suspect that most of us here tonight would notice our hunger and our thirst within a few hours and minutes.

[12:39] So let's picture now a drought in Edinburgh. Very unlikely, because we're in the wettest part of, one of the wettest parts of the world. But if there's no water, the taps are turned off, and you wake up tomorrow, what's the first thing you do?

You might turn on the news. Edinburgh Council announces, just sit tight, relax, don't panic, we'll get you your water, business as normal.

And maybe for the first day, it is business as normal. But what would you do in the second day? By this point, you're going to be really feeling the effects. Your tongue's parched, your throat's dry, your headache, well, you've got a pounding headache.

Would it be business as usual? Would you log on to check your emails? Would you start filling in the paperwork which you need to complete for next week, or even start thinking about your summer vacation or your holidays?

No, you just wouldn't, because there's this urgency. Your thirst is going to override all of those other secondary things. You're going to rise up, you're going to head out onto the street, and you're going to try and make your own way and try and find some water.

[13:53] And the point here is that you have primary and you have secondary needs. So it is with our spiritual needs. We have primary and we have secondary needs.

And the crucial thing is, just like physical primary and secondary needs, if we only listen to our secondary spiritual needs, then it will lead to spiritual wasting and spiritual death.

And so do we only listen to our primary needs? Are we content with our secondary ones? Have you ever lied?

Have you ever cheated, stolen, ridiculed, mocked? Have you been unkind? Have you boasted? Have you envied someone? Have you... The list is endless.

You don't need to listen to an exhaustive list of your sin. Because deep down you know it. And you don't need to be... You can be committing these. You don't need to be committing the worst sins against humanity of murder and theft and adultery for you to be starving spiritually.

[15:08] If we examine our hearts, we are all spiritually wasting. So we need to put our spiritual appetites above that of our worldly appetites. And that means we need to hunger and thirst for righteousness, as Jesus says.

What is righteousness? I said it before. It's to be who God made you to be and to do what God made you to do. We can understand righteousness if we look at unrighteousness.

In Genesis 3, it's to hide from God. It's to reject his lordship over us. And it's to live against the grain of his world. Righteousness is the opposite of this.

Quite simply, righteousness is for all things to be right. But right as defined by God. Our relationships to be right. Our thoughts to be right. Our words and our actions to be right.

And this is what we must hunger and thirst for. And we've got glimpses of that in our lives. We've seen glimpses of that in every one of our own lives. Have you sought justice in your life?

[16:16] Have you been wronged by someone? Or has your friend or your family member been wronged by someone? And have you really sought justice for them? Have you done charity work? Have you helped relieve those in need after a natural disaster?

Do you feel burdened? Do you long for peace when you listen to the news and you hear of wars and innocent people dying around the world? We all know righteousness.

The world is not as it should be. And we cry over it. And we seek to help in whatever way we are able. But here's the point. It's that God desires these things.

God desires these things more purely than we desire these things. God has these desires and he gives them to us. And so when we seek righteousness in some small way we have a desire to enact God's will.

To seek righteousness is to enact God's will. And that is our reason for being. That's what we were created for. And so Jesus is telling us that we aren't truly hungering and thirsting for righteousness unless we first seek a relationship with God.

[17:33] Real hunger and thirst is satisfied in knowing him. So the question which presents itself is do I, do you, hunger and thirst for God himself?

If we think back to our literal experience of hunger or our literal experience of thirst, it's urgent, it's compelling. Do we yearn for God in the same way? Christ does set an impossible example for us. I can only look back at my own life and think of all the times that I have sought righteousness so keenly, it was all too easily dissipated by the comforts of this world.

All too easily pacified by whatever else good thing that comes along. And even if we think about the most righteous men and women who ever lived, if we think about our favorite political leaders who have enacted justice in a particular way, kings and queens which have done right at times, billionaire philanthropists which have donated half their fortune to charity, even in all these glorious life-changing works, and they are life-changing, have any of these ever hungered and thirsted for righteousness?

And the answer is no. Because no one has ever longed for God, not perfectly, not truly. And only when we are in that right relationship with Him can we be free to hunger and thirst for righteousness, truly.

[19:18] And so the point I'm coming to, my third and final point, is how are we finding true satisfaction? Well, I said there was no one who has ever hungered and thirsted for righteousness.

Now, of course, that isn't quite true. Christ was the only one who ever truly hungered and thirsted for righteousness. And He says that if we hunger and thirst for righteousness, we will find satisfaction.

So let's look at Christ. What does He mean? How can we find that? We first have to look at what He does and how He does it. In Matthew 4, Jesus fasts for 40 days and was tempted in the desert. Satan tells Him, if you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread. But He answered, it is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

When Christ was led into the wilderness, it was to be tempted like Adam was. It was to be tempted like Israel was and ultimately like us. But the difference is when tempted with sin, He never caved in.

[20 : 28] He never wavered. He hungered physically because He was hungry spiritually for righteousness. Hungry to fulfill that which no man ever did. He hungered ultimately for righteousness.

Remember John 4. Jesus is with the woman at the well and He's offered food by His disciples. What does He say? I have food to eat that you do not know about.

My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to accomplish His work. And what is Christ doing here? He's hungering for His Father above all.

He was showing the disciples that the things of this world paled in comparison with pleasing His Father. And He shows this very same thing to us. When you think about Genesis 1, the serpent comes to Adam and Eve and He offers the notion of self-governance.

This is how you'll get true freedom. Reject your relationship with God. And how did they take this freedom? They took and ate. Derek, a well-known commentator, says, She took and ate.

[21 : 37] So simple the act. So hard it's undoing. It's a good way to know who you are. Ask yourself the question, what do you hunger and thirst for in the quiet moments of life when you have solitude?

When you hunger and thirst, what do you hunger and thirst for in the comings and goings of the day-to-day? And then look at Jesus and see that in the hardest moments of life, in the times when temptation was strongest, He still hungered for God, His Father.

And this proves He's the true and better Adam. And the culmination of this is when Jesus thirsts. The most important moment is when He thirsts fully on the cross.

In John 19, verses 28 to 30, it says, After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said to fulfill the scripture, I thirst.

A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge filled with the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to His mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, It is finished.

[22 : 46] And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit. And Jesus here thirsts on the cross most fully. How so? Because to hunger and thirst for righteousness is to hunger and thirst for God.

And to hunger and thirst for God is to enact His will no matter what the cost. And we have never been righteous like Jesus because we have never desired God like Christ did.

And in this moment, when He was most worthy to receive His satisfaction, most worthy to be filled, what does Christ receive?

He receives a mouthful of vinegar from mankind. Despite hanging all the way to God's, despite clinging on to God's will, He saw the victory of God, He saw the death of sin and death itself, and if anything was so obviously righteous, it was this particular moment.

And He thirsts for that. And where is His satisfaction? Humanity gives Him a mouthful of vinegar. And the Father, He turned His face away.

[24 : 13] And what is going on here? Why does the Father turn His face away? Because Jesus Christ bore the punishment which we deserved. And we deserve the Father to turn His face away from us because we haven't and we've never hungered and thirsted for righteousness.

But Jesus Christ was the only man who hungered and thirsted for righteousness. He hungered, thirsted, and died for it so that we might be satisfied.

John 7 tells us, on the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, if anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Are you thirsting for a right relationship with the world?

If you thirst instead for Christ, He will bring you into a right relationship with God. God's made the way for us. Hungering and thirsting for the world has distanced ourselves from God and only through the works, the intercession and the example of Christ can we be in right relationship with God and then with the world.

It's the very beginning of 2025. We're all thinking about our lives and how we might improve them. But examine your New Year's resolutions.

[25 : 37] Are they resolutions which are really going to bring true satisfaction? are you putting the world above God? Come, return to Christ.

Jesus is inviting you. He's calling you. Only in Christ can we see the men and women which we were created to be. No matter how your year goes, materially speaking, God promises that you that you will be blessed if only you're in right relationship with Him.

There's some here tonight for whom this will be your first time hearing the message. Some of you may have heard it many times before and never acted on it. Some of us are trying to be faithful but we're still struggling with the same worldly hungers.

But I want to say one thing and my final thing is whoever you are tonight, whatever your background or whatever your experience, this makes no odds to Jesus Christ. the answer is the same. No matter how long or short your walk in faith, the answer is repent and believe. Repent that you have not done enough, have not done enough, cannot physically do enough to be counted as righteous, but believe that Christ has and He has hungered and thirsted to cover you with it.

[27 : 03] let us pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for this, your words to us. We pray that you would bless us as we go out into 2025, as we think about what truly our hearts hunger and thirst for.

We pray for your help, your deliverance, that this year could be the year where we turn our hearts towards you and we put to death those things which we find our bodies truly crave.

These things we pray. Amen.