

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled

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Preacher: James Ross

[0 : 00] Now, before we turn to our beatitude, I want to read again, actually, a passage that we read not too long ago in church from Isaiah chapter 55 and verses 1 to 7, which says, Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters. And you who have no money, come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread and your labour on what does not satisfy?

Listen, listen to me and eat what is good and you will delight in the richest of food. Give ear and come to me. Listen, that you may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David.

See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a ruler and commander of the peoples. Surely you will summon nations you know not and nations you do not know will come running to you because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendour.

Seek the Lord while he may be found. Call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the Lord and he will have mercy on them and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

And then our beatitude for this evening in Matthew 5 and verse 6, Jesus says, Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

[1 : 49] Now when we hear the question, are you hungry? And we understand that that question works on two levels. On the one hand, there's the physical aspect, but we also get that image because we hear it today.

In the realm of sports, we can think of athletes and sports people who still have the hunger. In our careers, perhaps, we hear talk of being hungry for success or recognition.

Bruce Springsteen famously sang that everybody has got a hungry heart. Everybody's looking for satisfaction. And the question is, where is our heart looking for satisfaction?

Where do I think satisfaction is found? Do my appetite lead me towards Jesus or distract me from Jesus? Here we are in beatitude number four.

And there's again a flow to the beatitudes. So the first three help us to see clearly our spiritual emptiness, our poverty, that we should be mourning over sin, that there ought to be a meekness about us.

[2 : 56] But our response as followers of Jesus is not to despair and say, here's where I lack and there's nothing I can do about it.

Rather, disciples of Jesus, aware of our need, we long for greater righteousness. We sense that lack, but that lack leads us to hunger for God and for his will.

Now again, we've said this every week, there is a counter-cultural challenge to the beatitudes. Here's Jesus saying, the person who is blessed, who is happy, who knows God's favour, is the one who desires to conform to God's will.

Is that the message of our culture? Not really. Because by and large, we have replaced virtues, the will of God, what's right and wrong, virtues with personal values.

Instead of our society being built on, here's the solid rock of what we know and have received as good and right and true, grounded in God's word, that's been replaced, that solid rock foundation has been replaced with the shifting sands of my personal beliefs and values.

[4 : 14] And those are constantly in flux, as we've seen. And the result, to borrow from the title of a book by the Christian philosopher Dallas Willard, is that we live in the age of the disappearance of moral knowledge.

Simply put, we do not often know where to go to understand what is good and right and true. C.S. Lewis put it another way. He said, we're living in a time where there is the loss of moral courage.

So we need to get to a place where we can see that our moral decisions matter and what we choose as our moral compass matters.

And this beatitude says to us, once again, make God, make the will of God, our pole star.

Make that be the thing that guides us. Some questions for us to think about. What is this righteousness we are to hunger and thirst for?

[5 : 23] And there's a number of important answers to that that we can find in the Bible. First of all, that righteousness that we hunger and thirst for is for God himself.

Because he is righteous. Righteous. Psalm 145 in verse 17. The Lord is righteous in all his ways and holy in all his works.

Ours is a God who is faithful to his character, who fulfills his promises, who is righteous both in judgment and in salvation.

And Jesus is saying there is blessing to be found, there is joy and favour with God to be found when we have a hunger for a right relationship with God, when that is our fundamental desire.

Jesus would say it shortly in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 6. Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you.

[6 : 28] We read from the Old Testament in Isaiah chapter 55, God's invitation to those who would listen towards true satisfaction. Don't settle for temporary pleasure, satisfaction that comes and goes.

Rather, find satisfaction that lasts based on knowing and enjoying life with God. He calls us towards an everlasting covenant where God binds himself in loving relationship to his own people.

And how does he do that? Well, according to the book of Isaiah in chapter 53, he does that by sending his own son Jesus to be the suffering servant, the one who will die in the place of unrighteous people to bring us to a righteous God and to be reconciled to him.

So righteousness that we hunger for is to know God and to know more of God. It's also important to see that that righteousness we hunger for is a righteousness that is provided by the Lord Jesus.

Paul in 2 Corinthians 5 and verse 21 says, God made him, that is Jesus, God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

[7 : 58] So here's this great exchange that takes place at the cross. Jesus, Jesus, the one truly righteous one, he becomes sin, he bears sin for his people so that rebel sinners might be declared, reckoned to be as righteous as the Lord Jesus.

He takes my sin and he gifts me his righteousness so that in God's eyes I am declared to be righteous. That's all of grace and it's not something that we earn or deserve and so it's really important to understand that when Jesus talks about pursuing righteousness he's thinking about inner transformation not an external set of laws that we keep as a tick box exercise.

You can compare the teaching of Jesus with the Pharisees and how often they were in conflict because for the Pharisees their righteousness was all about the externals whereas Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount and all through his ministry is calling us to be transformed from the inside to have an inner heart and mind and motive that desires the will of God.

So we are to hunger and thirst for to be satisfied by and to find our hope in the perfectly righteous one the Lord Jesus and that righteousness he gives to us and that's something that we're never to lose our appetite for.

But there's also a social dimension to this righteousness that we are to hunger and thirst for. We are to hunger for living rightly for God.

[9 : 48] Where do we take our cues for moral goodness? For a Christian and for the church we are to take our cue from God and his word not the shifting values of our culture.

It's a reminder that when Jesus is our saviour he is also our Lord and our King. He directs what goodness looks like and what truth sounds like.

This is not the cheap grace that Bonhoeffer spoke against. This isn't Jesus gives you forgiveness as a free pass so you can do whatever you want because you'll be sure of going to heaven so long as you say a prayer.

This is not some kind of get out of jail free card. No, this is the reality that when Jesus bids a person to come and follow him, he bids that person come and die, come and die to self to live for Jesus.

So to hunger for that righteousness is to have a new appetite, a hunger for holiness. That we sense the gnawing pain in the pit of our stomach because of our disobedience, because of our failure, because of our lack of love for God and for others.

[11 : 14] We sense where we let God down in our words and our actions and our motivations and that pains us but it also motivates us in our desire to become more like Jesus.

So we hunger and thirst for living rightly for God. And again on that social dimension, we hunger and thirst as we seek God's righteousness in God's world.

Remember how Jesus taught his disciples to pray, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. So we desire to see the righteousness of God in the world that he has made.

And that has implications for our personal relationships so that in our family, in our homes, in our workplace, with our colleagues, in our friendships and with fellow church members, we want to speak and act towards people in a righteous way, in a way that conforms to the pattern that Jesus said.

But it's not just about relationships, it's also about a desire for justice. You read the Old Testament prophets and so often Israel is being condemned because of injustice, oppression of the poor, stealing the homes of widows, justice in the courts that could be bought and sold.

[12 : 46] Martin Luther King, as he saw the social injustice of racism, used the words of an Old Testament prophet, Amos, quoting Amos 5, 24, on a number of occasions, let justice roll on like a river, righteousness, like a never failing stream.

So we pursue justice looking at a high level, but also we pursue justice, for example, when we defend a co-worker from gossip or slander.

So it's about relationships, it's about justice, it's about moral integrity, that we hunger and thirst to be known as a people who tell the truth, who work with honesty, even when that hurts, who are known for fairness, who are careful against using our words in person or online to tear others down.

them. So the righteousness that Jesus calls us to long for is that we would live in relationship with God and want more of that, and to live rightly before God and for God in his world.

next question for us to think about is this, what can we say about hungering and thirsting?

[14 : 22] What's it look like? And again, this is an image that's helpful on various levels, you think about hunger, you think about thirst, we recognise these are fundamental, basic needs.

Jesus is saying at our core as Christians is to long for God and to long for his will, to desire to be more like him, to live in faith and obedience, that should be the appetite above all that drives us.

We see this in David's life in the psalm, psalm 42, he uses that picture of the dehydrated deer, desperate for streams of water, and David said that reflects my longing for God.

Psalm 63 which we'll sing at the end, David says I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, I'll be satisfied as with the richest of foods when I come to know and enjoy that sense of intimacy with my God.

And if David gives us a good example, Jesus gives us the perfect example in John chapter 4, he says my food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.

[15 : 41] Just as he said in Matthew chapter 4, man does not live by bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God. Jesus' will was that he did the Father's will.

Jesus loved to hear and to obey the Father's word. Jesus lived to pursue and complete his Father's work for him.

That was fundamental to his life. Perhaps in response, we need to take time to talk to God, to think about how is my appetite for God and for holiness and to ask that God by his Spirit would increase, our desire.

Another thing that we can recognise about hungering and thirsting is that these are needs that must be met. We know that they can be really painful experiences, hunger and thirst, if you've ever had a dehydration sickness or simply that rumbling and crumbling in the pit of your stomach because you haven't eaten for a day.

You know that it's painful. So as a common practice, we naturally plan for our meals so that hunger and thirst can be satisfied.

[17 : 07] Here's the question for us as followers of Jesus. Do we plan for righteousness and for character? Do we plan for those longings to be satisfied so that we would grow in our fellowship with God and our obedience to him?

God's need to think about our needs. How can we plan to meet those needs? Maybe we need to think about our bedtime.

Maybe we need to make use of our alarm clock, that we would go to bed early and we would get up early to give ourselves more time, time when we're awake, not half asleep, for reading God's word, for reflecting on it and for praying to him, to build a relationship, to confess our sin, to worship him, to ask for our needs at the start of the day.

It will involve us in time management. Who doesn't struggle with time management? So many things to do in the course of a day, but we all need to learn to either create time or protect time for God and for the people of God.

That we cannot be satisfied, we cannot grow as a Christian as we should unless we are making time for God and his word and worship and spending time with the family of God, our spiritual family.

[18 : 45] So we need to be around hungry people. Who do you know who loves digging into the Bible? Who do you know who has an active prayer life where you sense here is someone who knows friendship with God.

Here is someone who's working on their character. Here is someone who's honest about sin. Let's get around those people. Watch them. Learn from them. Talk to them.

Have your appetite stirred as you see theirs in action. And also it's a call to us as Christians to be who we truly are.

are. We need always to be talking to ourselves about the reality that in Christ we are a new creation. In Christ we are adopted into the family of God and as such we need to put on the qualities of our father in heaven.

We have a new set of family values to live by so we put off the old self like an old set of clothes. as Paul wrote so often in his lecture. So we are to be hating sin, killing sin, staying far away from temptation when we can.

[19 : 56] So we put off the old and we are to put on the new like a new set of clothing as the people of God by his grace with the help of his spirit seeking to grow in obedience.

Again thinking about these needs of hunger and thirst. We need to understand that these needs will be life long. When Jesus calls us to hunger and thirst after righteousness he's not saying to his first followers well do that for so long as the Sermon on the Mount is happening and then you can live however you want.

This is not some kind of fad diet. This isn't 30 days towards a better you. No this is an entirely new appetite. This is an entirely new diet. This is a deep change at the level of desires and at the level of heart.

And that desire for God and for his will needs constantly to be fed. Just as we wouldn't willingly and we shouldn't willingly starve ourselves or cause ourselves to become dehydrated, neither should that be the case spiritually.

we make progress in the Christian life and in Christian maturity when we have a God-directed hunger. Here's what I want most of all, it's more of God.

[21 : 26] So I'm going to come to him. I'm going to come to Jesus to find satisfaction. I never want to say I've had enough, I've had my fill. Japanese culture talks about learning to stop when your stomach is 70% full.

That's not what we want to do as Christians. It makes for probably really healthy lifestyle. Not spiritually though. We want to be completely filled and satisfied by God, his word, his will. Which takes us to our last question.

How is our hunger and thirst to be satisfied? So I remember as a student suffering a bout of food poisoning.

Not from my own cooking, mercifully, from dodgy mushrooms. But I remember days of pain and that sort of gnawing hunger during that enforced fast.

Well, after two or three days, I planned. When I feel better, my reward will be a feast. And so we went off to pizza. And my goodness, although it's average pizza tasted so good, because I'm starving.

[22 : 42] Jesus says the blessed person, the truly happy person, the person who's found favour with God, is someone who recognises I have a God shaped hole in my life.

And we're not trying to fill the hole in our lives with small things that cannot ultimately satisfy. love. But we've come to understand that knowing God, enjoying God, is the appetite to satisfy.

And not just do we see, here's where our hunger is, we come to Jesus for satisfaction. Because Jesus is the one who, in John chapter 4, said to the Samaritan woman who is searching for love and security, in any number of relationships with men, I am the water of life.

I am the one who can truly satisfy. I am the end of your searching for love and security. Because in me, you find God. In me, you find eternal. And Jesus is the one in John chapter 6, as we thought about in church not that long ago, who is the bread of life.

He is the gift of God that comes down and gives life. And he invites us to come. To turn from sin, to turn from unrighteousness, to look to him and be satisfied.

[24 : 05] Isaiah 55, turn to the Lord so that he might have mercy, that we might find his pardon, we might find his satisfaction in knowing him.

The wonderful truth is that as Christians, we can taste joy now. we can know God deeply today.

We can do God's will today. And that's great news. And that's something that should cause our desire to increase, but still, when we're honest, we also know there are times of emptiness.

When we are distracted from Jesus, when we seek our satisfaction in other places, there are times of frustration where we feel our weakness, our sin, our failure, our rebellion, our lack of desire, our falling into the same sinful habits time and time again.

So our hope isn't ultimately for now, good. It's for the future. Our ultimate hope is for the return of Jesus because then we'll take our place at God's feast.

[25 : 30] Isn't it wonderful how often the new heavens and the new earth are described as a feast, as a banquet? And then our desire for righteousness will be satisfied because we will be with Jesus and we will see him face to face.

Our desire for God will be fully satisfied and our desire for righteous living will be satisfied because we will be made like him, we will be made perfect, that sin will be gone forever.

So friends, let's let that hunger drive us to Jesus. Drive us to God and his word to recognise realise it's in him and his will that we can find that true and lasting satisfaction. pursuant.