

Transformed Appetites

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[0 : 00] You've heard me quote the words before. Anglican preacher Michael Green says that the task of the sermon is to explain to people what they've been experiencing during worship.

And I'm taken by the fact that this is an appropriately timed text. Our text today is from the Gospel according to Matthew chapter 5 verse 6.

Wherein Jesus announces the fourth of his eight beatitudes. In this beatitude Jesus draws us into the major theme of his Sermon on the Mount.

And in this beatitude Jesus draws us into the essence of our humanity in the image of God.

Because each of these beatitudes is related to the others it's important that we once again read Matthew 5 verses 3 through 12.

If you are able will you stand for the reading of the Gospel? Are you up to reading with me?

[1 : 09] I will read the blessed. You will read the four lines. Hear the word of God. Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn.

Blessed are the meek. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Blessed are the merciful.

Blessed are the pure in heart. Blessed are the peacemakers. Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness.

Blessed are you. When people insult you. And persecute you. And say all kinds of evil against you falsely on account of me. Rejoice. And be glad.

For praise and reward him. For so you are to be in God. Please be seated. Spirit of the living God.

[2 : 19] We believe. That hundreds of years ago. You caused Matthew the tax collector. To write down these words. In the way that we now have them. And we pray that in your mercy and grace.

You will take these words off the page. And make them come alive in us. As never before. For we pray it in Jesus name. Amen.

Blessed are those. Who hunger and thirst for righteousness. For they. And they alone. Shall be satisfied.

It's very important. That right from the beginning. We make sure that we are hearing these words correctly. Jesus does not say here.

Blessed are the righteous. That's true. It's said in other places of scripture. But not here. He does not say here.

[3 : 19] Blessed are those who feel righteous. He does not say here. Blessed are those who are on their way to righteousness. That's true.

He could say that in another context. But not here. He does not say here. Blessed are those who are declared righteous. Well that's true for sure.

And he can say that in many contexts. But not here. Jesus here is preaching grace. Blessed are those who knowingly unrighteous.

Hunger and thirst for righteousness. For they shall be satisfied. I've been arguing over these past weeks. That the qualities Jesus blesses in the Beatitudes.

Are not natural human qualities. That is we do not. And we cannot produce them. I cannot all of a sudden decide. That I'm going to be poor in spirit.

[4 : 18] Or pure in heart. Rather these qualities came into being. As a result of the power of Jesus gospel. These qualities are the consequence.

Of having been grabbed by Jesus. And his good news of the kingdom of heaven. These qualities are the result of having been gospelized. Jesus did not go throughout the villages of Palestine.

Looking for the poor in spirit. And the pure in heart. And then giving them the kingdom. Rather

Jesus went about the villages. Calling people to himself. Giving them the kingdom. And as a result.

They started to become poor in spirit. And pure in heart. It all begins with him. By grace. He causes his saving rule. To break into our lives.

And something happens. We find ourselves poor in spirit. And mourning. And hungry. And thirsty. As never before.

[5 : 15] The gospelized have encountered Jesus the God man. And they have encountered in him. His new world order. And as a result. They have become painfully aware.

Of how far short they. And the rest of humanity have fallen. They recognize their spiritual bankruptcy. And their utter dependency. They grieve over the depth of our brokenness and bondage.

And then. Because of what they see in Jesus. They yearn like never before. They yearn to become like him. They yearn to be rescued and restored. They hunger and they thirst.

Now here I need to be a bit more precise. I said that the Beatitudes are not natural human qualities. What I mean is. They are not the natural qualities of humanity under the reign of sin. I need to make that clarification. Because as a matter of fact.

[6 : 11] We were created to naturally long for righteousness. The natural appetite of the human species is for righteousness.

But sin came into the picture. And when we opened up to it. That natural longing got distorted. Other natural longings also got distorted. And are now more dominant.

Now more than righteousness. We crave food and drink. Comfort and pleasure. Wealth and fame. In his fourth beatitude. Jesus is preaching the gospel.

He comes into our world. He enters into all of our hungers and thirst. And then he restores in us the hunger and thirst for which we were made.

And in the process. Heals all those other natural appetites. Which by the power of sin. Have now become addictive.

[7 : 09] The Savior comes. Causes his kingdom to break in. And then redeems all the other hungers and thirsts. The hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Does not replace the hunger and thirst for food and drink. How could it? We are physical creatures. Who need physical sustenance. But the hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Does heal the hunger and thirst for food and drink. By delivering it from compulsiveness. By delivering it from egocentricity.

The hunger and thirst for righteousness. Does not kill the hunger and thirst for greatness. But it does heal the hunger and thirst for greatness. By delivering it from egocentricity.

Jesus the Savior comes into the midst of all our hungers and thirst. And transforms our appetites. Blessed. Right on. Right side up. Are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

[8 : 14] For they and they alone shall be satisfied. Now the question begging for an answer thus far is the question. What do we mean by righteousness?

Jesus builds the rest of the Sermon on the Mount around it. The Apostle Paul builds his great epistle to the Romans around it. Many of our hymns and many of our choruses use this word. What do we mean? Old Testament scholar Gerhard von Rott makes this observation.

There is absolutely no concept in the Old Testament so central. So central of significance for all the relationships of human life as that of righteousness.

Righteousness is the standard not only for our relationship for God. But also our relationship with other human beings. Reaching right down to the most petty wranglings. Indeed righteousness is even the standard of our relationship to the animals.

And to our natural environment. Now as I read that quote you no doubt heard the word relationship a number of times. Relationship, relationship, relationship.

[9 : 19] That's because relationship is what righteousness is all about. Dr. von Rott goes on to develop a thesis that righteousness does not involve living up to certain legal principles.

But rather living in faithfulness to the terms of a relationship. A person is righteous who lives up to the particular claims that any given relationship lays upon him or her.

Therefore righteousness simply means right relationship. Or right relatedness. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for right relatedness.

It is in this light that I think we are to understand God's gift of the law. The ten commandments. The apostle Paul. The apostle of grace.

Calls God's law the law of righteousness. That's because the law is all about right relatedness. The law is not some arbitrary code of ethics which God is seeking to impose upon the human species. [10:28] Rather the law is an exposition of the right relatedness brought into being by a right relationship with the living God. What is the first line of the law?

Most people will answer. You shall have no other gods before me. That is not the first line of the law. The first line of the law is I am Yahweh your God who brought you out of the house of bondage.

The law begins with the declaration of a relationship. A relationship already established. I am your God. In the ten commandments which follow that opening line.

God is simply then unfolding the nature of this divinely initiated right relationship. In effect God is saying look I am your God. You are my people.

Now that that is settled. Here is how the right relatedness is going to look in your lives. If you love me and trust me. You will not substitute another God before me.

[11:28] If you love me and trust me. You will live by a sabbatical rhythm of time. You will work six days and you will rest one. If you love me and trust me. You will honor your father and mother. You will not commit adultery.

You will not steal. You will not bear false witness. You will not covet. You will not be a man. You will not be a man. The law is not a list of do's and don'ts which we must obey in order to enter into relationship with the living God.

The law is simply a picture of the right relatedness brought into being by God's grace.

Disobedience. Disobedience. Disobedience to the law is so grievous not because a code of ethics was violated.

Disobedience is so grievous because it means the relationship was not taken seriously.

Disobedience. Now many scholars argue that the theological center of the sermon on the mount is Matthew 5 20.

In Matthew 5 20 Jesus says, For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

[12:32] Oh my. My, my, my. Surpass? My righteousness is supposed to surpass that of the doctors of the law and those who thought of themselves as spiritual giants?

How in heaven's name are the gospelized to surpass all that by realizing that the scribes and Pharisees had missed the point?

They thought of righteousness in terms of external conformity to a code of ethics. But as Jesus argues in chapter 5 of his sermon, we can obey the letter of the law.

We can obey the letter of the law and not be at all faithful to the relationships that are protected by the law. Thus a man can say to himself, I am righteous before my neighbor because I have not caused his blood to flow.

Ignoring the fact that anger and words of insult are just as damaging to the relationship. Or a man can say to himself, I am righteous toward this other woman because I have not slept with her.

[13:39] Ignoring the fact that lustful fantasies which use her for his own end are as equally damaging to the relationship. Are you with me? Jesus is saying then that the righteousness of the kingdom goes beyond legality.

Just because an action is legal does not make it righteous. Just because an attitude is culturally acceptable does not make it righteous.

For righteous or righteousness means faithful to relationship which means operating on another level. The level of mercy and honesty and justice and servanthood.

And it is to that level Jesus calls us in the rest of the Sermon on the Mount. Righteousness then is all about relational integrity and relational wholeness.

A relational integrity and wholeness that encompasses the entire universe, the totality of life. In scripture, we are told that there are four basic relationships which are constitutive of our being in the image of God.

[14:47] These four relationships are most powerfully laid out before us in the opening chapters of the Bible in Genesis 1 to 3. There we discover that we are first of all created for a relationship with the earth.

We are physical, ecological, material creatures. Our welfare is bound up with the welfare of the earth. The Hebrew word for humanity, there is the word adam.

The Hebrew word for the earth is adamah. Intricately interconnected. A relationship with the earth. There we also secondly discover that we are made for a relationship with other people.

We are social creatures. None of us is whole in isolation. All of us needs community. Third, we discover that we are made for a relationship with the inner self.

We are psychological creatures. And fourth, and most fundamentally, we discover that we are made for a relationship with the Holy God, a relationship which holds all these other four together.

[15 : 43] We are spiritual creatures. We were created then for this holistic righteousness, right-relatedness with the physical environment, right-relatedness with other human beings, right-relatedness with the inner self, able to be at peace with ourselves and accept ourselves, and right-relatedness with the Holy One, wherein we trust and obey.

We enjoy and we love and we experience God's own joy in being God. Now, we cannot read the Bible for very long without catching God's hunger and thirst for this complete right-relatedness, which means we cannot read the Bible very long without experiencing great grief.

For the created order is not marked now by righteousness. It's marked by alienation and estrangement and suspicion and manipulation and fear and hatred and violence, all because we have broken that one central relationship causing all the others to unravel.

Blessed, blessed, blessed. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for that full-orbed righteousness. Blessedness. Jesus uses very intense words here in this fourth beatitude.

William Barclay makes the point best. The hunger which this beatitude describes is no genteel hunger which could be satisfied with a mid-morning snack. The thirst of which it speaks is no thirst which could be slacked by a cup of coffee or an iced drink.

[17 : 14] It is the hunger of the person who is starving for food. It is the thirst of the person who will die unless he or she drinks. Jesus is not blessing those who are mildly uncomfortable with the world.

He's not blessing those who are mildly uncomfortable with themselves. He is blessing those who cannot live unless they find righteousness. Blessed is the person who longs for righteousness as though his or her life depends on it.

Why this intensity? Why should this intensity emerge in the soul of the gospel eyes? Because the gospel is all about righteousness. The kingdom of God is all about right-relatedness.

The gospel says that the righteous God, the God of all right relationships, will not give up. God's great passion for all of creation to reflect and enjoy right-relatedness will not be thwarted.

In Jesus of Nazareth, the living God enters into all the unrighteousness of the world in order to rebuild this fourfold relational existence. The apostle Paul tells us in his letter to the Romans, I am not ashamed of the gospel.

[18 : 29] Why, we ask? Why are you not ashamed? Because, he answers, the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. It's the power of God unto wholeness. Why, we ask?

Why does the gospel have this kind of power? Because, answers Paul, in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed. Or more exactly, in the gospel, the righteousness of God breaks through into the world.

The gospel is all about God righteousizing our wrecked relationships. In Jesus, God is repairing all four of those relationships. The relationship with God, the relationship with the self, the relationship with others, and the relationship with the earth.

The crucifixion and resurrection are the beginning of this reconstruction process, and they are the guarantee that God is going to see it through to completion. And that is why Jesus congratulates those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

They are craving what the living God craves. Congratulations! You are alive with the divine appetite. The living God is not a solitary being.

[19 : 41] The living God has forever existed in relationship, in that holy, right-relatedness of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is out of that right-relatedness that we were created.

Indeed, it is for that right-relatedness that we were created and redeemed. Makarios, blessed, right on, right side up, are those who cannot live unless they find this righteousness.

It means they're alive with the passion of God. Right on are those who crave for a right relationship with the earth. Right on are those who crave for a right relationship with other human beings.

Right on are those who seek reconciliation between individuals and groups and nations as though their life depended upon it. Right on are those who crave a right relationship with the self.

Right on are those who want to have an integrated self. It means that you have the divine appetite alive in you. And right on are those who crave for a right relationship with the living God, who starve unless they get a relationship with God that is shot through with intimacy and trust, wherein we can cry out, I love you, you are my joy.

[20 : 54] Blessed, blessed, blessed. Blessed are those who cannot live unless they find this righteousness. For they shall be satisfied. Only they shall be satisfied.

When? On that day when the kingdom finally breaks through. On that day when the completion, when the job is completely done. But because Jesus has come and because He is present and because He is causing His kingdom to come near even now, our hunger and thirst can be satisfied to a great degree now.

Every day before that day, Jesus offers us Himself as the embodiment of all that right relatedness. As He said to a very thirsty woman by a Samaritan well, so He says to us, ask of me and I will give you a drink of living water.

As He says to people whose stomachs were filled but who were terribly hungry, so He says to us, I'm the bread of life. Keep coming to me and you will not be hungry. Keep believing in me and you'll never be thirsty.

As He said to people who had their fill of religion but who were bone dry, so He says to us, if you are thirsty, come to me and drink and out of your innermost being will flow rivers of living water.

[22 : 10] We cannot come just once for when we come, He awakens even greater longings. The bread of life satisfies but every taste of it makes us want more.

The living water quenches but every sip of it makes us want to have more. But take heart. George MacDonald once said, in things spiritual, increasing desire is a sign that satisfaction is drawing near.

In things spiritual, increasing desire is a sign that satisfaction is drawing near. Well, do you see where we have come this morning?

It turns out that the hunger and thirst for righteousness is the hunger and thirst for the righteous one himself.

St. Augustine was right. All of our longings are, in the final analysis, longings for God. Blessed are you who are going to die unless you find God.

[23 : 13] Rudard Kipling was very ill one time and as he lay on his bed, the nurse came and said, do you want anything? And Kipling responded, I want God.

Blessed, blessed, blessed, blessed, blessed are those who are going to die unless they find God and all the right relatedness that is in him.

They shall be satisfied. blessed, blessed the real life and the right