

A Longing for Something I Do Not Know

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Date: 24 June 2020

Preacher: David Parker

[0 : 00] at verse 6, Matthew's Gospel, chapter 5, verse 6. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. As you know, fortnightly we've been going through the Beatitudes and we've reached the fourth Beatitude. And I want to bring three things from this Beatitude. Firstly, a longing for something we do not know. Secondly, the longing that is blessed. And thirdly, the longing that will be satisfied. But before we look at those three areas of this Beatitude, I do wish to make a few preliminary comments. Firstly, this Beatitude, blessed are those that hunger and thirst after righteousness, encompasses and comprehends all the other Beatitudes, and indeed the entire teaching of the Sermon on the Mount. That entire teaching is an unfolding of that righteousness that Jesus is talking about in this Beatitude.

The importance of the idea of righteousness in the Sermon on the Mount is obvious from the number of times it is used. It's used three times in chapter 5 here, and it's also used twice in chapter 6, and it's used at Jesus' baptism. You'll remember that he said to John he wanted to be baptized in order to fill all righteousness, and it's used at the end of Matthew's Gospel. Furthermore, the idea of the righteous comes up in Matthew's Gospel about 11 times. Righteousness is a massive concept throughout the Bible. It has at least, it's got a big semantic range, but there are at least four areas of that semantic range that I just want to list for you. It has a relational aspect, a right living aspect, a right standing aspect, and a redemption or salvific or salvation aspect. And in this Beatitude, Jesus addresses something important in the human experience. And that something is what this deep longing that is inside every single person, every single human being, this restlessness and this search for answers to the great questions of life. Indeed, those who hunger and thirst after these things that we'll look at in a moment, they seem to know that there is something missing in their life. And so there is this deep longing within the human psyche for something we do not know, a kind of spiritual amnesia.

Secondly, by way of my preliminary comments, we must not try to squeeze this Beatitude into the Pauline idea of justification by faith. Why? Because we must remember that the revelation of God comes through the flow of history, and that that revelation is progressive. And we must take heed of the historical context as well as the biblical context as well as the scriptural context of where we find these concepts.

I've already indicated the breadth of meaning in the word righteousness. Another word that has that breadth of meaning is law. People that exegete Paul and Romans have to be careful every time they come across the word *nomos* or law, because it can mean different things at different points, even in Paul's argumentation.

[4 : 48] And thirdly, I just want to give you a kind of bird's eye view of Jesus's, what I call Jesus's general take on life, so that there's a background, if you like, in our minds to the context of this Beatitude, blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness.

You know, Jesus, as all of us know, said, man or woman shall not live by bread alone. And a person's life consists not in the abundance of possessions that they have.

There is Jesus telling us, do not build your life on materialism. He also said, you'll remember, don't store up treasure for yourself, for where you have there is, there is your treasure.

He also tells us that you cannot serve God and money. And he's got an anti-selfism, I think, as well as an anti-materialism in his general outlook.

Remember, he said that he who finds his life loses it. What does he mean? I think he means that clinging on to our own will, our own little self, and our own life will result in that sense of emptiness still not being fulfilled.

[6 : 13] And thirdly, that is the unhealthy desire for having power over other people. Do you remember he said, don't be like the Gentiles, they seek to lord over people.

They're power grabbers and controlling people. And do you remember he said, what does it profit a person if they gain the whole world and lose their own soul?

Not only ultimately, but in the process of pursuing the world. And of course, there is our text, blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness.

Let's look then firstly at this hunger that I am seeing is endemic and characteristic for every human being. And what is this inner hunger, this longing?

Sometimes it can manifest as some sort of vague sense of emptiness. A sense of not belonging. A feeling of incompleteness.

[7 : 26] A feeling of lostness. Lostness. Deep calling unto deep within our inner self. And what are the kinds of things that people hunger and thirst for?

You know something? I'm going to say food and water. There was a psychotherapist called Abraham Maslow. And he has a famous triangle, a hierarchy of human needs.

And at the top of that hierarchy is something that he calls self-actualization. But at the very bottom of it is food and water.

And he rightly says that those that don't have food and water have no impulse and no spirit to endeavor to move upwards in that hierarchical pilgrimage, if you like.

What are the kinds of things that we humans hunger and thirst for? Food and water and shelter. Houses, cars, iPads, phones, clothes, items for the house.

[8 : 35] Xboxes, games, sexual satisfaction. Career, status, gender equality. Acceptance, justice, truth, freedom, health, success, peace of mind.

To have someone to share our life with. To love and be loved. To have a sense of meaning and purpose. You can also have negative longings, can't you?

To be free of an unhappy or abusive relationship. An intolerable burden of ill health. To be rid of our personal demons.

Perhaps right now, you're hungering and thirsting after one or more of those things that I've mentioned. Well, keep listening.

For Jesus tells us something really important in this beatitude. But before we see what that is, let me pose one more question.

[9 : 34] As we think about this hunger and this thirst and this longing that seems to characterize human beings.

Where does this longing come from? Why do all these things matter so much to us? Could it be the case that the reason is that we are indeed made in the image of God?

And that these longings point to an intimate, sorry, a restlessness of spirit. Because of our alienation from the eternal spirit of God.

Could it be that their real object is God himself? So then, there is this hunger and thirst that is characteristic of every man, woman, boy and girl.

But where should this longing be directed? Who or what can really answer the longing that lies deep within? And that brings me to my second point.

[10 : 56] Notice what Jesus said. I'm sure it must have startled the people who first heard it. And I'm sure if we went out into the streets and our cities and towns and villages and thundered out, blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, people would be scratching their heads.

The party goes, the hedonists, the people that seek to build in this world's goods. And yet, that's what Jesus said.

And I want to look at three dimensions of this righteousness that Jesus has mentioned. And the first one I want to look at is it's relational.

I said to you at the beginning that if you do a study in this world, in the Old Testament, you will find, and it's a massive content, it's in the Old Testament hundreds of times.

One of the things that it has is a relational dimension to it. And let me just remind you, as we think about this, Christianity is not some kind of mechanistic thing.

[12 : 15] It's not a system or a program or a set of rules, but a relationship with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ.

Christianity is something that's alive. It's living. It's dynamical. It's organic. And Jesus, remember, is issuing this statement to his disciples who already have a relationship with him.

He's issuing this statement to the crowds and saying, this righteousness entails following me and having a living, live relationship with me.

Can I ask you, do you have a relationship with the living Jesus Christ, the one who sits at the right hand of God, the one who ever lives to make intercession for us, and the one that yet can come to you wherever you are tonight?

And the second thing about this righteousness is that it is a righteousness that includes a concern socially.

[13 : 34] Remember what Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount. You'll know the bit when I say it. He says, so that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

This righteousness is something that is dumb. For instance, if we look at chapter 6 and verse 1, Jesus says, be careful not to do your acts of righteousness.

Not to do your acts of righteousness. In 520, he says, I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and teachers of law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

And he says at the end, doesn't he, of chapter 6, verse 33, seek first his kingdom and his righteousness.

Note that little pronoun there, his righteousness. Jesus is not talking about a human righteousness. He's talking about a righteousness that's from God.

[14 : 48] But it's a righteousness that's public and social, that they may see your good works, as well as private and spiritual. Go into your room and lock the door and pray to your Father in secret.

So this righteousness is relational. This righteousness entails right living socially. A concern for justice.

A concern like the psalmist. That we sang of. A concern about what Paul has. That he might know more of Christ. And then this righteousness has to do with our right standing before God.

Yes, it's not a statement on Pauline justification by faith. But that word righteousness does point to and is related to and associated with the people of God.

The people who have been drawn to him by his love and by his grace. And of course, notice also in this beatitude that Jesus says, blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness.

[16 : 07] And then he tells us in verse 10, blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness. And in verse 11, blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, say all kinds of evil against you.

Rejoice and be glad because great is your reward. So righteousness is mentioned in connection with Christ.

That's my point here. And therefore, it's a Christological righteousness in that sense. And as we know that Jesus himself is the embodiment and personification of that righteousness that he speaks of and of that righteousness as even encompassing those qualities in the attitudes.

So we have to ask ourselves, how much are we hungering and thirsting in our relationship with Jesus Christ?

These words, hunger and thirst, are very strong words that have been picked out by Matthew. They associate, they have in mind, the picture that they have in mind is people who are famished, people who are starving, people who are panting with thirst and dry.

[17 : 49] In other words, they're talking about an intense seeking after the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Surely that's a challenge for all of us, for myself and for each one of us.

How intense is our hunger and thirst for Jesus Christ. And then finally, the hunger that will be satisfied.

Jesus said, and remember, it's not simply a declaration as I mentioned, I think, when I was going through the first beatitude, it's an exclamation. Oh, the blessedness of those that hunger and thirst after righteousness.

Why is that? Well, he tells us, they shall be filled. That yawning gap, that chasm, that emptiness, that longing for something that we do not know, that lack of sense of belonging and connectedness will be filled.

I want you to notice the future tense. Indeed, I want you to notice that six of the beatitudes and the promises attached to them are in the future tense.

[19 : 23] but I equally want you to notice that the first beatitude and the last beatitude is the present tense. And in both the first and last beatitude, as you know, the phraseology is theirs is

present tense, the kingdom of heaven.

And these two tenses, the grammar, if I could put it that way, reminds us that the kingdom is still to come in its fullness, in its glorious fullness.

And yet the kingdom has come with the breaking in to humanity of our Savior, Jesus Christ. And I want to tell you another thing about the grammar.

The word is in the passive voice. I said it was his righteousness. And I'll tell you another thing. He's the one that will fill that great emptiness.

Only him. No other. Not even another human being. were the whole world of nature mine that were an offering far too small.

[20 : 53] But the wonder is that we can have a present enjoyment. Now, I think that is related, of course, to our relationship.

Let me just pause for a second. Perhaps there are people out there in our Zoom audience, I don't know, who are not even in a relationship with Jesus, can ask you to think very carefully about what Jesus is saying tonight.

Blessed are they that hunger and thirst for righteousness, for a relationship with me, to do my will and to be a part of my people.

Are you feeding your soul in Christ? Is he your spiritual bread and living water? if you're still not drinking from the eternal well of righteousness, remember that that God-shaped vacuum, only Jesus can fill that vacuum and give us that ultimate satisfaction.

I'm just about finished. It all begins as we abandon and forsake not only our own righteousness, but every attempt to fill that inner vacuum with anything and everything except the God who made us.

[22 : 47] one last thought I want you to take away. As you know, Jesus in John's Gospel once said this, I am the bread of life.

And he also said in another place in John's Gospel, if any person thirsts, let that person come to me.

But the bit I want to leave with you is later on in John's Gospel in chapter 19. Jesus said two words as he hung upon the cross.

He said other words, I realise that, but the two words that I want to draw to your attention this evening are these, I thirst. I thirst.

now I have no doubt that that utterance partly referred to his dryness and his need of fluid in the particularly hot climate of Israel.

[24 : 16] But you know, I wonder if there's a spiritual dimension to that comment. And I wonder if the one who told us that blessed are they that hunger and thirst, if the one that told us if any man or woman, boy or girl first let them come unto me, I wonder if he was experiencing that dryness and that thirstiness and that diminishing and receding warmth of his heavenly father and that exquisite fellowship that he had had with him before he became a man and hung on that cross.

and you know he did it so that he can fill your thirst and my thirst.

Do we know the satisfaction that Jesus speaks of here? Do we know the blessings spoken of in this beatitude?

Amen. And may the Lord bless these thoughts to each one of us for our eternal good and his eternal glory.

So we