

A Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness

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[0:00] Matthew chapter 5. As we turn to Matthew chapter 5, you come into what's titled, as you see in the ESV Bible, the Sermon on the Mount, so where Jesus is here with his disciples and a large crowd gathered and he's teaching them many different things about life and our experience in this world, but above all, our experience with him. And the Sermon on the Mount covers from chapter 5 through to chapter 7 in Matthew's Gospel. We're going to focus this evening on one of the Beatitudes, as they're called here, in verse 2 to verse 12. We're going to focus on that one I mentioned earlier in verse 6. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. When you turn to this sermon, the first thing we want to notice about the sermon is it's not all about just how we practically live. It's not telling us these are the do's and don'ts in life.

But first and foremost, we see that the Lord here is teaching us about his gracious ways towards us. It's not about what we do for him, but what he does, has done and will do for us as his people. And we have to bear that in mind as we go into this. If we're just looking for something where we're asking, Lord, what do I have to do? It's not all about that. Because our focus is first and foremost on the Lord himself, what he has done for us. And as you go through the Beatitudes, you realise that there is so much in them that he has already done. But you see that there's also things that he is yet to do for us as well. They're great sayings, these Beatitudes. They remind us of just how the Lord is with his people in every kind of circumstance. And you see it just in the kind of things that it speaks about. The poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek. There's a whole host of different kinds of people mentioned here. So as we look at a Beatitude here, it helps us to see what the Lord has done for us. And they're not just found here in Matthew chapter 5. Beatitudes are found all the way through the scriptures. You have the same ones mentioned in Luke chapter 6, verse 20 to 22. It's mentioned there as well. But you see them in other places as well, like Psalm 1, which we sang together.

Blessed is the man. So it's there speaking about a Beatitude, a blessing upon the one whose focus is on the Lord. And then what you find is in Psalm 1, it then goes on to describe what that person is like. They're like a tree that is planted near a river, which yields its fruit and its leaves are always green. So there's a blessing that we are finding in the Lord, but then we see that there is profit from that as well, what the Lord does for us. So a Beatitude, it's like a statement, a pronouncement from the Lord to his people, followed by a promise. So as you go through them here in verse 2 down to verse 12, you see, blessed are, and then it says, for they shall.

And so when you're thinking of Beatitude, you're thinking, well, if we want that blessing, what's in it? How do we find it? There's something for us to do. And as we look at verse 6, we are blessed when we hunger and thirst for righteousness. And when we do that, then we see they shall be satisfied. And so it asks questions of us. It asks us, well, is that the way our heart is towards the Lord? Are we with that hunger and thirst for righteousness? As a people, we don't maybe know what it is to physically hunger and thirst. We can be well satisfied every day of our lives with the food that we eat, with all that we have to drink to satisfy our thirst. There are people around us, though, who do know what it is to physically hunger and thirst. And when you find that hunger and thirst satisfied, quenched, you realise then how powerful a thing it is to have that hunger satisfied.

[4:49] But this is looking at not just that kind of practical way, not that practical way at all. It's looking at how are we with the Lord? How are we hungering and thirsting for him? Like Psalm 42, which we sang

together as well. That's speaking of the deer that pants for the water. Do we have that desire for the Lord, that hunger, that thirst for the Lord? And so do we have that hunger and thirst for righteousness?

We're going to look at this verse and just look at what it's saying to us as we see the different words that are used in it. And we begin with the word blessed. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Blessed is a word that's commonly used. We see it everywhere in the scriptures, Old and New Testament alike. It's a word that's used often and we use it often as well. We use it at the end of a text message or an email. Blessings to you. In some form we say blessed to people in day-to-day language. It's a word that's commonly used. There was the phrase hashtag blessed. The word is used in so many different ways. But what does it actually mean? It's used both from our perspective towards God and God's perspective towards us as well. In a sense of from ourselves towards God. It's what we do is we praise him as we worship him. When you think of Psalm 103, although my soul bless God the Lord and all that in me is, there's that sense of us blessing God and giving praise, giving worship to him. And it's that desire in the psalm is that his soul will be stirred up, stirred up to bless the Lord. So we can give that full praise to him. And so in terms of from our perspective towards God, it's about having that right relationship with him. We know blessing when we are right with God. As we trust him, as we look to him, as we lean on him, as we depend on him for all things. But then again, you see it, it's not just us towards God. It's more importantly, God towards us. Because blessing is divine. It's in God, it's from God. It's not some kind of emotional state that we find ourselves. And we're not blessed just when we have peace around us. We're not blessed when we are in good circumstances or when we're surrounded by joy. It's much more than joy. And when you look at it as it's used in the Beatitudes, you realise, well, it has to be more than that. Because when you look at the circumstances that the Lord is speaking about here, it's not the natural place you would find joy as he goes through these Beatitudes.

Blessed are the poor in spirit. It's not those who are rejoicing and glad. It's those who are poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn. So you see, it's not just circumstances that dictate how we are blessed. It's much more than that. It's knowing that the Lord is there for us no matter what. One person noted it like this. Those who are blessed in this sense. Outwardly, they may have much to be pitied. But from the higher and therefore truer standpoint, they are to be envied, congratulated and imitated. So it's not just looking at circumstances and saying that person is to be pitied when they have the Lord. Because when you look at it from God's perspective, they can be blessed because they are trusting in him. And the Christian should be seen in that perspective. So that no matter what circumstance we are in, we are going to know that God is with us. There are some people that translate the word happy. Blessed and happy are used intermittently. They're interchangeable in some ways. But the problem is when you look at the word happy and understand it in the English sense of the word, how do we understand it? What does the word happy mean to us? Happy is an emotional state in many ways.

And it's the opposite of sadness. It's the opposite of sorrow. So when we talk about being happy, generally we think about things that make us feel good, give us a sense of joy that there are good things going on in our lives. Happiness, we can be talking about circumstances. So if you get a new job, you're happy, you might also say you're blessed. When you get a promotion, you might say you're happy, but you might describe it as blessed. When you have a child or a grandchild, you're happy. And you say you're blessed. And there's so many of these ways that we could describe that the word can go together.

[10:28] Happy and blessed can go side by side. But would you say you're happy when you're in poor spirit? Would you say happy is the one who is mourning? We don't say it naturally because it's almost like the opposite. And so blessed is not just happy. It's a very different kind of meaning. And the meaning is found when we see in the Beatitudes, the circumstances. It's got a much deeper reality.

It's much deeper than just a happiness in a good circumstance. It's a happiness, a blessed, no matter what. So it's not to do with our circumstances. It's to do with what the Lord is doing for us in our relationship with him. To know that God loves us, that God cares for us, that God has done great things for us. And what's what we see when you go through the scriptures, when you find God's people in so many different circumstances, they know they are blessed when they're able to

look to God and know that he is there with them. Blessed are those who are poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are those who are meek. There's so many things that you would say. It's not just happy, but blessed in knowing God. And so it is with blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. It's not just happy in it, but knowing God's blessing in it. Just as we go back to Psalm 1 again, blessed is the man who walks in the ways of the Lord. And that ways of the Lord, it's not always straightforward. As you go through the likes of Psalm 23 as well, where you see

God's blessing, it's in the midst of all the different varieties of life, whether it's by the still calm waters, whether it's through the valley of the shadow of death, the Lord is with us. And so blessed has that relational side to it, where we are trusting God, where we are seeking to bless God ourselves with all that we are, but we are seeking God's blessing on us in our right relationship with him. So it's not a prayer just asking God to bless us. Jesus isn't teaching us, pray like this here. It's more a reminder to us, a reminder to us to keep trusting God, to keep looking to God.

Blessed is God's gracious way of dealing with his people. So there's so much in the word blessed, blessed are those who hunger to bless us. And yes, we could say so much more about it as you find it through the scriptures, but it's just a reminder to us of a relationship with the Lord. Whatever experience we have, whatever we're going through, that we can know God's blessing on us. And so the word blessed then is used in each of these beatitudes, these statements that are made for us. But as we look at verse 6, we focus in then on blessed are those who hunger and thirst. There's a desire here, or there should be a desire here. If we want to know the blessing, then this is how we are going to know it. When we hunger and thirst, and we're hungering and thirsting for righteousness. This should be our attitude, if you like, towards righteousness. This is how we should be living our life. And are we? Are we living like this? Is this the way that we live? With this hunger and thirst for righteousness? He is speaking to a people who would have known times of real hunger and thirst in that experience. We may not know it ourselves, but many of the people Jesus is teaching here, they would have. They would have experienced times of hunger and thirst in a literal way.

[14:52] And so as he's speaking to them, he's speaking into their experience and saying, well, in that experience, you longed, you hungered, you thirsted for something to take away that hunger, for something to take away that thirst. And as he's speaking to them, he's saying, this is how your relationship should be with the Lord as well. When you've known times of not having God, when you've been spiritually thirsty, when you've been spiritually hungry, when you've had no satisfaction in anything that this world has offered, and yet you come and know the grace of God. You should keep longing for it, longing, hungering, and thirsting for that righteousness. Like Psalm 42, the psalmist there describing the deer panting for the water. So pants my longing soul for you. That's what the psalmist is saying. Can we sing these words and say, well, that's my soul. That's my soul towards you as my Lord. I'm just panting for you. I'm yearning for you. I'm thirsting for you to know more.

There are times when we just have to look at ourselves and ask, is that me? As I look at these beatitudes, is that the way I am? Am I hungering and thirsting for righteousness?

We are all capable of giving good praise to God. We are all capable of doing good things for the cause of God. We're capable of praying to God in the good times. But do we do it all the time? Do we do it in the ups and the downs, the highs and the lows? Are we a people who have that hunger and thirst for righteousness? To have that right walk with God? There was a story from World War I when the Allied forces, they were in the Middle East at the time and they were chasing the enemy, if you like, through the desert. And they were going through battle after battle after battle, slowly making their way through the desert. But as they were journeying on, they were realising their supplies were running low and water was starting to become scarce.

And they thought, well, we can't keep on fighting if we don't have any water. And so as they were pressing on, they realised they had to get somewhere that they could get that water supply replenished.

And they were marching through the hot desert. And so as they were journeying on, they realised they were in trouble. But they knew where they could get water and they decided, we need to get there. We can't keep fighting without this supply. But it took them so long to get there, they lost many of the battalion on the way. But eventually, they reached the place where the water supply was.

[18:00] But they were exhausted. Many of them were almost collapsing. And there were so many of them and they couldn't all get to the water immediately. And they also had to set up defence in case an attack came. So it was agreed that those who were the fittest would go on lookout to guard against the enemy coming. And those who were the weakest would go to the water first. And one soldier who was a Christian was in those who was feeling fitter at the time. And they had to wait until they got the chance to drink the water themselves. For four hours, they waited. And eventually, he got to the water himself. But as he did, and as he reflected later on, he said, we realised and learned a real lesson in that time. And he said it like this, as we marched from Beersheba to the Sharia wells, He said, if we're such our thirst for God, our thirst for righteousness and for his will in our lives, a consuming, all-embracing, preoccupying desire. This was his reflection on the thirst that he experienced. If that was our thirst to God, how rich would all of us be in the fruit of the Spirit? That was the lesson that he took from that thirst. To realise that longing for his natural thirst to be quenched. If only he had that thirst, if we had that thirst for God, how rich would all of us be in the fruit of the Spirit? Jesus is speaking about that intense longing. Where we're hungering and thirsting for righteousness. And so that hunger and thirst is directed towards, thirdly, righteousness. Righteousness.

And we note here that the people, it's not that the people are righteous. They have a righteousness through faith. But that there's still a longing for more. And what is this righteousness that we are hungering and thirsting for? Well, again, the word righteousness, it can have different meanings. There's at least three different meanings you could take. Ways that the word righteousness is used. One is a legal righteousness. Where we're looking at it more in the courtroom kind of setting. Where a righteousness is a legal standing. Guilty or not guilty. And as we think of that, well, if we're hungering and thirsting for righteousness, what are we wanting with God?

We are wanting to be found that the verdict is not guilty. That our sins are forgiven. That instead of our righteousness, which are like filthy rags, we are hungering and thirsting for the righteousness of Christ. By which we know that we are forgiven our sins. So that as we appear at the judgment seat of Christ, as we appear on the day of judgment, that we will be declared right with God. So there's that aspect of it. There's another aspect of it as well, as we think of hungering and thirsting for righteousness. It's this ongoing nature of it as well. It's not just coming to the well and taking a drink and your thirst is satisfied and you're done. It's that thirst is satisfied until the next time. And so it is with our hunger and thirst for the righteousness of God. It's always ongoing. We never have a full store. We're never fully satisfied. We're always with that need of it on an ongoing basis. And so our righteousness is linked into our sanctification as it were. We're going on with the Lord. We're growing in the Lord.

We're growing to be like the Lord. So that his righteousness is becoming our righteousness more and more. And then there's a third meaning for righteousness here as well. This righteousness that we are hungering and thirsting for isn't just for ourselves, but it's for all around us.

So that as we experience this righteousness, as we are blessed in this righteousness, our longing is that this righteousness will go out to all others. And you see that throughout the scriptures, through the Old and the New Testament, righteousness exalts a nation. So it's not just about an individual righteousness. It's a collective righteousness where we're not just saying, well, I'm going to hunger and thirst for righteousness, but we will hunger and thirst for righteousness.

[23:13] As a church, as a nation, as a world, this should be our longing, our desire. This is what the Lord wants for his people everywhere, to know his righteousness. So that when we have it for ourselves, we know

that we are declared righteous in Christ. When we see it as a need for ongoing, but that we see it too, that it goes out broader. It grows beyond just us, goes beyond just our walls.

It goes out into all around us. So the hunger and thirst for righteousness should be part of our mission as well. Where that mission is when you receive water, when you receive food, you don't just keep it all to yourself. If there's others who are hungry and thirsty around you, you share it out. And so there's a sense of that mission in these words as well. Where this righteousness is not just contained to ourselves, but shared with others. As a righteousness that's described in the scriptures in different ways as well. In Romans chapter three, the righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. We all fall short. Everyone around us falls short. But this righteousness comes through faith in Jesus Christ. And we don't depend on our own righteousness. Ezekiel chapter 33 verse 13 makes that clear for us.

So if I tell the righteous man that he will surely live, but then he trusts in his righteousness and does evil, none of the righteous things he has done will be remembered. He will die for the evil he has done.

So there's the warning. A righteous man, but he trusts in his own righteousness and does evil. So we need to keep going in this righteousness as well. Don't trust in our own, but hunger and thirst for the righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus Christ.

[25:38] And then you see, finally, blessed are those that hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. And so here is the promise that God gives to his people.

They shall be satisfied. And this final part reminds us of two things. The first thing is, not everyone will be blessed.

because not everyone hungers and thirsts for righteousness. And so it's only through this righteousness, this righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus Christ that anyone will ever be satisfied.

And there's that warning there for us too, that there are those who are perishing, that there are those who are perishing in their sin.

And so, as a people, that is why the righteousness of Christ needs to be made known to others. That they would not perish, but come to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[26:53] Because they're chasing after everything in this world that will satisfy, that will fill them, that will make them happy, that they might call blessed, but that without Christ is nothing.

And so there's a warning. But there's also a promise. There is a promise in there as well. That for those who keep going, for those who hunger and thirst for this righteousness, they shall be satisfied.

And this is a sense of what we would call the already, but the not yet. that we have much to be thankful for and we have many blessings here.

But that we can remember that there's so much more to come. And when you look at the other Beatitudes here as well, you realise that it's not just for the here and now, but for the future as well and for eternity in many ways.

blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

[28:10] Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

there's so many of these blessings, Beatitudes, that yes, there's blessing now, but there's so much more to come. There's so much more to look forward to.

1 Corinthians chapter 2 verse 9 and 10 it says, but as it is written, what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him.

These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit, for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. We cannot imagine it.

What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him. And so as you look at the Beatitudes and the promises that there are in them, and we

see the grace and love of God towards us, it reminds us that he has prepared a place for his people.

[29:22] He has prepared a renewing for his people. The poor in spirit, they will have the kingdom of heaven. Those who mourn, they will be comforted and fully comforted in the coming of the Lord.

When you think of the book of Revelation and what it says, how the Lord himself will wipe away every tear. We don't have that yet, it's still to come, but we have so much to look forward.

We cannot imagine what God has prepared for those who love him. And so there's so much more to come. But the question is as we finish, is it what we're hungering and thirsting for?

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. This isn't just receiving a thimble of water to quench a bit of your thirst.

This is the fountain of life that the Lord has to give to his people. It makes our cup overflow. When we hunger and thirst, we shall be satisfied.

[30:40] To go back to what that Christian soldier said, if such were our thirst for God, our thirst for righteousness and for his will in our lives, a consuming, all-embracing, preoccupying desire, how rich would all of us be in the fruit of the Spirit?

Is that our hunger and thirst this evening for the righteousness of God that comes through faith to know we will be fully satisfied.

may we have that hunger and thirst. Let us pray. Lord, our gracious God, as we come to your word, it so often reminds us of how far away we are from what we should be.

But we thank you that you are a God who speaks, a God who hears our cries, who knows our longings, who knows our shortcomings, and yet is so gracious and faithful towards us.

and we thank you for your word and how you have given it to us for every experience of life. To know that to be blessed is not just to be happy when things are going well, but to be blessed is to know that you are with us through all things, that you never leave or forsake your people, that you remind us that you take us through this world, through all its challenges, through all its ups and downs, but that we have even more to look forward to, the things that no eye has imagined or seen, of what God has prepared for those who love him.

[32:16] And so we pray, Lord, that you will make us hunger and thirst for your righteousness day by day and more by more. So hear our prayers, forgive our sins, we ask all in Jesus' name.

Amen.