Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Only Way to Happiness: Thirst for Holiness
Scripture: Matthew 5:6
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The Only Way to Happiness: Thirst for Holiness

Tonight as we continue in our study of the Beatitudes, we are drawn back to Matthew chapter 5 and this wonderfully rich portion of Scripture. And even though these are very short statements and very short verses, I find myself hard pressed to get into one message everything that comes to mind as we consider them.

In Matthew chapter 5 Jesus preaches a great sermon. It runs all the way to the end of chapter 7. It's a rather lengthy sermon. Matthew, you remember, introduces Jesus as King and in this sermon we find the manifesto of the King, or the principles of His kingdom.

The bottom line is Jesus offered people a kingdom of happiness. The word "blessed" basically means happy, satisfied. He was offering blessedness. He was offering real happiness. But He was offering it on terms very different than the Jews might have expected.

Each of the Beatitudes expresses conditions and/or characteristics that belong to those who enter into His kingdom. Christ, as you remember, came as King, Matthew points that out. His kingdom is a spiritual kingdom. He rules over the hearts and lives of those who believe in Him. This kingdom has certain characteristics and the characteristics are outlined in the Beatitudes. This kingdom is made up of people who are poor in spirit, who mourn, who are gentle or meek, who hunger and thirst for righteousness, who are merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers and who have been persecuted, insulted and against whom all kinds of evil has been spoken falsely. Those are the things that characterize those in the Lord's kingdom.

But in spite of all of that which seems like anything but a happy list. I mean, poor in spirit, mourning, meek, hungering, thirsting and even suffering, in spite of that the note that signals each beatitude is the word blessed or happy. There is in His kingdom true happiness, true satisfaction. Kingdom people are happy and they're happy because they're characterized by these conditions.

Now we come tonight to verse 6, the fourth in this list of Beatitudes... Beatitudes meaning statements of blessing. Verse 6 says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be satisfied, or they shall be filled."

This beatitude speaks about a strong desire. It speaks about a driving passion, a consummate ambition...those who are hungering and thirsting for righteousness. Hungering and thirsting here communicate to us something of a deeply felt need. That's exactly the point that our Lord is making. People who come into His kingdom and people who live in His kingdom are characterized by a certain kind of hunger and thirst. They have a strong desire. They are driven by a passionate ambition. They are on a very intense pursuit.

This is not uncommon to mankind to be intense, to be passionate, to be pursuing. In fact, most people spend their lives pursuing the wrong thing. Many people, of course, have perverted ambitions, but even those who have ambitions for what on a human level might be noble find themselves at the end of their life either having never attained what they pursued or having attained it found that it wasn't all that it was supposed to be. It's easy to spend your life looking for the wrong thing.

There are many illustrations in the Bible of those who pursued the wrong thing. I think, first of all, of Lucifer, for example, who was already God's most glorious creation, who was already the supreme angels among the angels, and yet he was driven with a passionate ambition, a strong desire, a consuming pursuit. He had a resolute devotion to being like God, according to Isaiah 14:13 and 14. He said, "I will be like God." He was hungry for power. He was hungry for greater glory. And God reacted, you remember, by throwing him out of heaven. In fact it says in Isaiah 14:15, God says, "You shall be brought down."

Another one who was very ambitious, who pursued with a passion the goals of life which he himself had devised was Nebuchadnezzar, the great king of Babylon, the greatest of the ancient world empires, as indicated by Daniel, the most, really the most glorious empire in human history. He had a strong desire for glory. He wanted all glory to come to himself. That's, of course, why he wanted everybody to bow down and worship him and not pray to any other gods. And, of course, all of that ended up causing Daniel's friends to be thrown in a fiery furnace when they disobeyed the king's desire. But in Daniel 4 and verse 30 the king reflected and said, "Is not this Babylon the great which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?" Here was a glory-hungry individual, praise hungry. And, of course, God reacted to him, as you remember, by driving him out of the palace, out into the field where he lived like an animal for seven years. In that situation his hair grew, it says, like eagle's feathers and his nails like bird claws. He lost his mind. He was bereft of his senses and became a madman for the next seven years when God punished his perverted ambition.

I'm reminded in the New Testament of someone else who had a great pursuit in mind. Jesus tells the story of one who is generally called the rich fool. The story is in Luke chapter 12 and it deserves at least a comment. Luke 12:17, this is a certain rich man who was very productive. He began

reasoning to himself saying, "What shall I do since I have no place to store my crops." The thought of giving them to somebody else never entered his mind. He said, "This is what I'll do, I will tear down my barns and build larger ones and there I will store all my grain and my goods." The idea was, I'm going to consume it upon myself and nobody else and I'll just build bigger barns to hold it. "I'll say to my soul...Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come, take your ease, eat, drink and be merry." Here was a man who was pursuing possessions, who was pursuing pleasure. He never had enough, he just wanted more and more and more and Jesus basically indicated in verse 20 that he was a fool. God said to him, "You fool, this very night your soul is required of you and now who will own what you have prepared. So is the man who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

But that's how it is in the world. That's how life in the world is. People in the world pursue fame and fortune and glory and possessions, achievements that will bring them a certain amount of power or a certain amount of praise, or a certain amount of comfort, a certain amount of ease and pleasure. And sometimes because of all these wrong ambitions, ambition itself is somehow put down. But ambition is a wonderful thing if ambition is directed in the right way. In fact, that's precisely what this passage is talking about. The apostle Paul, remember, told the Corinthians that he had an ambition and his ambition was to be pleasing to God. Nothing wrong with being driven by a passion. Nothing wrong with pursuing a goal. And that's the implication here in Matthew chapter 5 that people who come into the kingdom and people who live in the kingdom are passionate people. They are very much aware of what they don't have and how desperately they want it. And that's depicted in the language of hungering and thirsting.

People in the kingdom have a passion about something. They have a strong desire. They're ambitiously pursuing it. It is not a material thing. It is not worldly glory or honor or possessions. It is righteousness. And righteousness is to the kingdom citizen what food and water is to the natural person. That's why the parallel is so good. Food and water are necessities, not luxuries, and so is righteousness. People know, you know and I know, you can't live without food and you can't live without water. It's impossible to live without it. And so it's impossible to live in God's kingdom without righteousness. our physical life depends on food and water, our spiritual water life depends on righteousness.

By the way, people in the biblical times knew a lot more about hunger and thirst than we do. It's rare for us ever to be hungry or thirsty. We have ready access to instant food and drink at any time. But people in the ancient world didn't have that wonderful advantage and famine was very common and so was draught. You remember it was a famine that drove Joseph's brothers into Egypt, as recorded in the book of Genesis. And ever since that first recorded famine, man has faced famine through the centuries. And in the Middle East it has been a somewhat common experience, hunger and thirst, famine, draught, starvation.

For example, famine came to Rome in the year 436 B.C. Caused literally tens of thousands of people to throw themselves into the Tiber River and end their lives because they couldn't deal with the fact that they had no food. Famine struck England in the year 1005. And all Europe suffered in 879, 1016, and 1162, all of Europe from a famine. Even in the nineteenth century with its great advances and technology, hunger has stalked many countries, and we know about that, countries like Russia, China, India, even Ireland some years ago, and many died.

Today it is still true, although it seems to be lessening some in very recent years, that there is much famine in India. Thousands die of malnutrition and its accompanying diseases. And hundreds more perish in places in Latin America and obscure places in third world countries around the world. Hunger has always been a very close neighbor to the human race.

And this physical hunger of man which becomes such a desperate thing is only a sort of small symbol of the deeper more serious hunger of the heart that is identified here, the hunger that is a spiritual hunger. The parallels must be drawn so that you understand this. When we say somebody is hungry and thirsty, we...we...we mean probably they missed lunch by fifteen minutes, or at the outside a half an hour. But when the Bible talks about hunger and thirst, it's talking about an exigency for which there is no immediate solution. It's talking about a certain level of desperation. And the people who come into God's kingdom come because they have a desperation. The unsaved person whose heart is moved, who hears and understands the message of the gospel has awakened in him by the work of the Spirit of God an immense compulsion toward righteousness that nothing else can satisfy.

In the heart of the non-believer there is a hunger for sin. But God in His might power reaches into that heart at the point of conviction and takes out that hunger for sin and replaces it with a hunger for righteousness. And the person stops seeking that which is not bread and seeks the true bread of life or as Jeremiah puts it very vividly in Jeremiah 2:13, "They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed themselves out cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water." They are thirsty, all right, but they turn their back on the true water. They're hungry but they turn their back on the true bread.

But we live in a world of people who are hungry and thirsty, driven people, pursuing, a compelled people. And they're running as if they were starving and running as if they were perishing with thirst after what they think will satisfy. And it doesn't. But the people in the kingdom also are ambitious. They're driven, they're passionate but it's for righteousness.

Think about the prodigal son. The prodigal son, Luke 15, he had a lot of passions. In that little story you see them repeatedly. First of all, he had a consuming desire for money, for earthly treasure. He had a consuming desire for what it could buy by way of possessions and pleasure. He had a passion for iniquity and because of his drive for sin and his drive for pleasure, and his drive for possessions

and his drive for material things, he went to his father and basically demanded his inheritance. And then he took his inheritance, you remember the story in Luke 15, and he went out and he just wasted it on all those things which he passionately desired. And he wound up satisfied...is that right? No. He wound up empty. When he had managed to catch everything he was chasing, when he had managed to achieve all of his goals, when he had managed to experience all of those ambitions, he was empty.

And he thought to himself, "How many hired servants, slaves in my father's house have bread enough and to spare. He had absolutely nothing. He wound up working for some Gentiles, no doubt, on a pig farm, slopping pigs and eating pig slop, when he decided it would be better to go home to his father. And at that point the parable is saying his hunger changed. First he was hungry for money and earthly treasure that he might fulfill his lusts. Then he was hungry just to be satisfied with pig slop. And finally he was hungry enough to go back to all the bounty that his father had. That's the picture of hungering and thirsting after righteousness. When you've had everything you thought would satisfy and it's just pig slop.

You go back, reexamine your heart and if the Spirit of God should prompt you, a new hunger for righteousness emerges. First John 2:15 to 17, very familiar passage, reminds us that appetites can never be satisfied by this world's fare. "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him, for all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the boastful pride of life is not from the Father but is from the world and the world is passing away and also its lusts." It's all a vapor. It's all a dream. It's all a fantasy, it provides no satisfaction, none whatsoever.

So, right at the start in looking at this beatitude, back to Matthew chapter 5, you can ask yourself the question...what do I really hunger for? Because the results of that question, the answer to that question will tell you whether you are a kingdom citizen or not. I mean, what is the driving ambition of your life? What is the compelling desire of your heart. What is it that you really long for? What is it that you really want? The people who are entering My kingdom and living in My kingdom, those who are coming into My kingdom, those who are members of My kingdom hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Now in order to unfold a little more about this beatitude, we've been asking questions in each case and I'll ask some questions and then answer them tonight. It works as a way to sort of take us through the elements.

Number one question, how does this beatitude fit with the other ones? How does this sort of fit in? The first one, "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, actually, for they shall inherit the earth." How does this sort of fit in?

Well, remember now, poor in spirit means morally bankrupt. People who come into the kingdom, people who are kingdom citizens recognize their own moral bankruptcy, they recognize their own inabilities, their own wickedness, their own sinfulness. They recognize they have nothing to offer the Lord whatsoever by which He would grant them salvation. They provide no merit. They can do nothing to earn His grace. And so there is a poverty of spirit. There's a bankruptcy of spirit. That produces in the second beatitude mourning. They sorrow over that sinful condition and that sorrowing over that sinful condition produces meekness. That is to say when you realize how morally bankrupt you are and when you are truly broken over that, you will take the lowest place before a holy God.

But rather than just stay in that sort of morbid condition, the beatitude that we're looking at tonight tells us where you go from there...you begin to hunger and thirst for righteousness. Having recognized that you don't have any, you know you need it. When in meekness and mourning and brokenness you see your true sinful condition and begin to hunger and thirst after righteousness which you know you need but cannot earn, which you know you need but do not have, you are giving evidence of being a kingdom citizen.

So, you see, there's a sequence here. The flow is very obvious, very obvious. We live in a middle of a society chasing all the wrong things, even religious, people who think they're good enough, they're kind enough, they're nice enough, they're religious enough. And they're not bankrupt. They don't recognize their utter bankruptcy. We're not talking here about felt need, we're not talking here about, "Well, things aren't working out at my job, or things have kind of gotten messed up in my marriage, or I'm not really happy with the career I've got or I've got a lot of guilt and a lot of shame in my life, or I had a lot of abuse as a child and I need to kind of get over this, and I need a sort of a psychological boost." We're not talking about that, we're talking about such an overwhelming weight of conviction about your sin that you turn to mourning and you're left to see yourself in the lowliest of places.

Jesus says, "Those are the very people who in that condition are going to recognize that what they desperately need is righteousness and what they don't have is righteousness and so they hunger and thirst for it. That's how this beatitude sort of fits in with the rest. Happy are the morally bankrupt. Happy are those who weep. Happy are the meek. And happy are the hungry.

And I want to emphasize all the way through this little series we do that these are conditions of entrance into the kingdom and constant characteristics of kingdom people. You don't stop realizing your moral bankruptcy after you enter the enter the kingdom, you probably have a greater understanding of it now then you did when you were converted. You don't stop grieving over your sin, you probably grieve more now than you did then because you know so much more about your sin and how God views it from the increased knowledge of Scripture, and because of the increased battle against the flesh. You don't feel more proud the longer you've become...the longer you've been in the

kingdom, you feel more humble the longer you've been in the kingdom because the more you are around the Lord, the King, the more of His glory you see and the more of His glory you see the more you realize your nothingness. So, these are conditions of entrance into the kingdom and also characteristics of those who are kingdom people.

Now verse 6 is also transitional not only because of what went before but because of what comes after. If you notice in verse 7 it says, "Blessed are the merciful, blessed are the pure in heart, blessed are the peacemakers." Listen, that's what follows this four beatitude. Until you have hungered and thirsted for righteousness and then been satisfied, you can't be merciful, pure in heart and a peacemaker.

So the first three beatitudes flow into this one and the next three beatitudes flow out of it. Where there is moral...a sense of moral bankruptcy, weeping over sin and meekness, the heart cries out for righteousness. When that heart receives that righteousness that individual then who has received mercy, who has received cleansing, who has made peace with God becomes merciful, pure in heart and a peacemaker. The Beatitudes have a wonderful and blessed sequence.

All right, a second question then as we consider this wonderful beatitude...what does it mean to hunger and thirst? Well I've already told you it's the idea of an intense desire. What are we really talking about here?

Let's look at little more into that. The force of Christ's words again may not be clear to us because we don't know what it is to be hungry and to thirst. In the ancient world they were dealing with low wages, they were dealing with scarce food. There were not fast-food places, there was not accessible food. The battle for bread was basically consuming. It took up all the hours, all the waking hours of the day and all the planning moments of the night. And then there were wind storms that destroyed crops, terrible Sorroco(?) winds in the Middle East. There were draughts. It's against that background that Christ speaks. The people in My kingdom are people who seek righteousness. That's what they want. They're not looking for prosperity. They're not looking for material prosperity. They're not looking for healings. They're not looking for wealth. They're not looking for success. They're not looking for health. They're not looking to have their marriage fixed. They're not looking to have a happier environment, a better job. They're not asking God to just tweak their life a little bit and fix up some of the things they don't like. There is a desperation in their lives but it has nothing to do with those temporal matters.

What they're desperate about, what they're hungry and thirsty for is far beyond anything this world has to provide. They want righteousness as much as a starving man who fears death wants food, and a thirsty man who fears death wants water. Desperation is the key idea.

In a book called The Last Crusadeby Major Gilbert, an account is given. I think it's a fascinating account of part of the British Liberation of Palestine in World War I. You remember the British liberated Palestine and really allowed Palestine to become a state of its own. Dr. E.M. Blalock tells the story of The Last Crusade, in the book, in these words. "Driven up from Beersheba...which is in the south...a combined force of British, Australians and New Zealanders were pressing on the rear of the Turkish retreat over arid desert." The Turks, you remember, had occupied until they were liberated by the British. "The attack out-distanced its water-carrying camel train." In other words, the soldiers got beyond their water supply. "Water bottles were empty. The sun blazed pitilessly out of a sky where the vultures wield expectantly. Our heads ached...writes Gilbert...our eyes became bloodshot and dim in the blinding glare. Our tongues began to swell. Our lips turned a purplish-black and burst. Those who dropped out of the column were never seen again. But the desperate forces battled on to Sherria(?). There were wells at Sherria and had they been able to take the place by nightfall, thousands were...unable to take the place by nightfall, thousands were doomed to die of thirst." They had to press to where there was some water or die.

"We fought that day...writes Gilbert...as men fight for their lives. We entered Sharia's station on the heels of the retreating Turks. The first objects which met our view were the great stone cisterns full of cold, clear, drinking water and the still night air, the sound of water running into the tanks could be distinctly heard, maddening in its nearness. Yet not a man murmured when orders were given for the battalion to fall in two deep facing the cisterns."

He describes the stern priorities. The wounded, those on guard duty then company by company. That was the order. It took four hours before the last man had his drink of water. In all that time they had been standing twenty feet from a low stone wall on the other side of which were thousands of gallons of water. "I believe...Major Gilbert concludes...that we all learned our first real Bible lesson on the march from Beersheba to Sherria wells. If such were our thirst for God...he wrote...for righteousness, for His will in our life, a consuming, all-embracing, preoccupying desire, how rich in the fruit of the Spirit we would be."

And that's exactly it. Even the Greek terms support this intense idea. Look at the word "hunger," peinantes(?) from the verb peinao, to hunger, to suffer want, to be in need. Then the word "thirst," dipsao, Jesus used it when He said, "I thirst." To suffer thirst, dipsantes(?)in this case, two participles. The strongest impulses in the natural realm, the need for food and the need for water. They are both, by the way, present tense participles, continuous action, showing that this is a way of life, constantly hungering, constantly thirsting for righteousness.

It reminds me of Moses who had been given the law of God, Moses, who had seen the glory of God. In obedience, you remember, to God's command he erected the tabernacle. And when the tabernacle was completed he...he went into the tabernacle and into the presence of God at the same time, and there he made a request that reveals what was really in his heart. Exodus 33:13 he says,

"Show me now Thy way that I may know Thee." And in verse 18 he says, "I beseech You, God, show me Your glory."

What's the point? All that God had already shown him was only enough to create a greater appetite for more. He didn't pray a prayer of thanks having seen the glory of God, having seen the hand of God in the marvelous ways that God had revealed Himself up to that point, he didn't say, "I've had enough, thank You very much." He said, "Show me more."

David walked in such close communion with God that he wrote Psalms about God's presence, many of them. Many of the Psalms talk about how David enjoyed and rejoiced in the presence of the Lord and how he himself was comforted and how his people were comforted by the presence of the Lord. It was David who said, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want..." And yet in Psalm 63:1 and 2 David says, "O God, You're my God, early will I seek You. My soul thirsts for You. My flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where no water is to see Your power and Your glory." Always wanting more, always hungering, always thirsting.

And it was beloved Paul in Philippians chapter 3 saying, "That I may know Him." And we would say, "Paul, you know Him better than anybody else knows Him."

"But I don't know Him well enough and all that I know about Him only wants...only elevates my want to know even more." Knowing Him like I know him is not enough.

Peter said, "Grow in grace and in the knowledge of your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." And we understand that.

I believe, and I've said this through the years, but I believe people become Christians when they reach this desperation level. A lot of people come and go in the church and make some kind of a momentary commitment to Jesus Christ. They're like that rocky ground in Matthew 13, or like that weedy ground, they come for a while, there's a little bit of show of response and then they disappear. And the real issue, what really was wrong there was the level of desperation wasn't high enough. Oh they may have been desperate about a marriage problem, they may have been desperate about an economic problem, they may have been desperate about a physical problem, an illness, some kind of tragic diagnosis of some disease. They may have been desperate because of wayward children, or abuse that's going on in their life somewhere, or whatever it might be, some terrible trauma, some great sadness. That's not the issue.

What legitimately drives people to God is not a hunger and thirst for a better life, prosperity, happiness, bliss, joy, etc., etc. What drives people is a hunger and thirst after righteousness. It's when they realize their moral bankruptcy. That's the issue. That's what must be in the heart of one who comes to the kingdom.

J.N. Darby(?) many years wrote, "To be hungry is not enough. I must be starving to know what is in His heart toward me. When the prodigal son was hungry, he went to feed on the husks. But when he was starving he went to his father." It means to be desperate enough to reach out to God who, according to Luke 1:53, "Has filled the hungry with good things and He always will."

What does it mean to hunger and thirst? It means to be desperate. It means to want one thing and one thing alone and that's righteousness because you're literally overwhelmed with your sin. You want to keep this in mind when you're talking to people about coming to Christ that they understand that what...what brings about or what is inherent to a true conversion is this longing after righteousness.

Now, the third question, then, would be...what is the objective of this desire? Well, the objective is to receive righteousness. He doesn't say it's to receive happiness. They're not hunger and thirst...hungering and thirsting after happiness. They're hungering and thirsting after righteousness, that's why they're happy.

You don't directly seek happiness. God gives it. He blesses those who are overwhelmed by their moral bankruptcy, who are overwhelmed by their sin and mourning, who are meek and humble and lowly and who are passionately, desperately pursuing righteousness. They're not pursuing happiness, they just receive it from God. The one who pursues happiness is generally doomed to misery. People who come to the church and listen to the gospel and make some move toward Christ because they want Jesus to make them happy...miss the whole point. They would be like a man with a terminal illness who wants to go to the anesthesiologist and just get a shot so he doesn't feel any pain. But if the man is only concerned about the relief of his pain, he's a fool. Something far more important needs to be done, he needs to be cured at the point of his deadly disease.

People come all the time to the church on this grounds, come all the time because there's something wrong in their life or they're upset or lack of fulfillment has moved into their life or they've been living a long time and all their goals have gone up in a puff of smoke and all their relationships have disintegrated and their children have become a disappointment, and etc., etc., etc. And in the pain of all of that they wander into the church and typically today that's exactly where the church thinks you have to meet people. And so, the message is geared to those people with their felt-psychological, emotional, social, economic, physical needs. That's why there's so many shallow conversions, so much fruitless seed planting.

You see, the world would like to eliminate the pain but we're here to eliminate the problem. Big difference. And the problem behind the pain is...what?...sin. And it's not until a person grapples with the sin issue, you want to be very careful when you witness to people that come to you and say, "Oh, my husband left me...my husband left me..." "Jesus will fix you." That's not an issue. You know what

happened in many cases like that, probably most of them? The person might have prayed a prayer, responded to Jesus and the husband didn't come back anyway...and maybe things got worse from the marital standpoint or the family standpoint. That's not the approach.

But even in the church people are looking are for experiences for a quote/unquote "holy highs," I guess. Some spiritual ecstasy, some joy, some...some alleviation of the pain of their sorted and unfulfilled life. That won't do it, folks. That's not going to bring you into the kingdom. It's when you hunger and thirst for...what?...righteousness. Dikaiosune...what does it mean? To be made right with God. When the thing that consumes you is you want to be right with God, when the thing that consumes you is you want your sin dealt with, when the thing that consumes you is you want forgiveness, you want to enter in the fellowship with God, you want to dwell forever in His holy heaven, you want your sin forgiven, you want to be made right with God...that's the issue. That's why you can't reduce the ministry and message of the church to just preaching at people's psychological felt needs. That's a false promise and it produces many shallow conversions. You have to preach the issue is sin and you have to come to the recognition of your bankruptcy morally and you have to be grieved over your sin, your lowliness compels you then to cry out to God for a righteousness that you know you need and don't have.

So, first of all, hungering and thirsting for righteousness has to do with salvation. It has to do with salvation. It's a desire to be right with God. Whatever happens in my marriage, whatever happens in my job, whatever happens in my career is not the issue. Whatever happens with my kids, whatever happens in the problems of life, the sorrows of life, the bad news that I've received, my illness, whatever it is, that is not the issue. The issue is an eternal issue, it's about my relationship with the eternal God. It's about my sin problem.

The man or woman who hungers and thirsts after righteousness sees that sin and rebellion have separated him or her from a holy God and that that separation has immense implications in time and most notably in eternity, namely eternal punishment in hell. And the person longs to end that separation, longs to end that rebellion, longs to be forgiven of sin so that they might enter in to the blessing of God in time and the heaven of God in eternity. That's the issue. People aren't going to be saved when they seek a happy life. They're going to come into the kingdom when they seek righteousness.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote, "To hunger and thirst after righteousness is to desire to be free from self in all its horrible manifestations in all its forms. When we considered the man who is meek, we saw that all that really...all that really means is that he is free from self in its every shape and form, self-concern, pride, boasting, self-protection, sensitiveness, always imagining people are against him and a desire to protect self and glorify self. That is what leads to quarrels between individuals. That is what leads to quarrels between nations, self-assertion. But the man who hungers and thirsts after righteousness is a man who longs to be free from all that. He wants to be emancipated from self-

concern in every shape and form."

And you know what is notable? He doesn't say it but it's true. What's notable is he's overwhelmed that the truest thing about himself is that he is wicked and sinful. That's what initiates salvation.

In fact, in many Old Testament passages righteousness is synonymous with salvation. I won't take time to develop that but I can think of at least a half a dozen times in the book of Isaiah where righteousness and salvation are equated. Salvation then, and that is forgiveness of sin and entrance into God's kingdom belongs to those who hunger and thirst for a right relationship to God. And when they hear that, that right relationship to God is available through Jesus Christ, they come embracing Christ in desperation. They know they are unable to please God in their own flesh because they are bankrupt morally.

A man then, or a woman, must desire righteousness enough to abandon all hope of achieving salvation by his own efforts, all hope of achieving salvation by the efforts of someone else, some earthly intercessor, or some religious system. And when the person comes to that point and pursues forgiveness of sin through Jesus Christ and the righteousness of God that's then imputed to them, as the Bible says, by faith, when they seek that righteousness they are satisfied. God gives it to them. And, first of all, it is the righteousness of salvation...salvation.

But secondly, I think we would have to add that it's also the righteousness of sanctification because after you've come into the kingdom because you're seeking righteousness, you don't stop seeking it. You continue to seek it, not in the imputed sense of justification, but in the sense, the imparted sense, I guess we could say, of sanctification. I'm sure it's true of you as a Christian, you haven't stop wanting righteousness, have you? It's a way of life. You want what's right before God. You hate your sin. You're like in Romans 7, "I hate what I do when it dishonors God. I find a principle working in me that causes me to do what I don't want to do and not do what I want to do. It's this wretched flesh that still clings to my redeemed spirit." So that the rest of life is a matter of pursuing righteousness.

You desire not only the righteousness that comes in salvation by the act of God declaring you righteous and imputing Christ's very righteousness to you, but you desire the righteousness that comes in sanctification, that is the continual conforming to Christ. I have received His righteousness in justification, I am pursuing His righteousness in sanctification. His righteous perfect life has been put to my account in justification, but I am working to have my own life conform to His character in sanctification. I don't have less desire for righteousness now, I have more desire than I've ever had, even more than I had when I became a believer because I know so much more now.

Now back to verse 6, another little note on the language here, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." Let me demonstrate this truth that this is a total righteousness that's being

sought here. It's not minimal, it's not nominal, it's not marginal, it's not minor, it's total. I'll show you how we can know that.

In the Greek language, usually when there's a verb that is followed by a noun in the genitive case it is expressed in English by the word "of." So the...that's what you have here. The Greek would then say, "I am hungry for of food," using the genitive case. "I am thirsty for of water." And Greek scholars call that the partitive genitive. That is to say they are...they are hungry for only a part of the object. If I say I am hungry for food, in...in English that's undefined. You don't know how much. I could be hungry for all the food in the world. But in the Greek if you say "I am hungry for..." in the genitive, we don't...we don't have those cases in the English language so we...we can't make our language say this. But in Greek you can. In the Greek, "I am hungry for of food," what I mean is that out of all of the available food, I want some of it. So you have a qualifying partitive genitive. I want part of the food in the world, and I am thirsty for of water, for some of the available water, not all of it.

Now this is how this would normally be expressed. It would normally be expressed in a partitive genitive form. But that is abandoned here, most interestingly. And "righteousness" is in the accusative, where it is not partitive but it is comprehensive. So what he is saying is...I am not hungering and thirsting for out of righteousness, but I am hungering and thirsting for righteousness. That speaks really of the whole thing. It's a longing for perfect righteousness. It's a longing for full righteousness.

It's what David meant when he said, "I shall be satisfied when I awake in Thy likeness." And, by the way, there's a definite article here in the Greek so it's saying...Those who hunger and thirst for THE righteousness, the righteousness of God. This is what's in the heart of the true repentant. You are hungering for what is the very comprehensive, complete and total righteousness of God. It begins with salvation and continues with sanctification.

And the language here is so rich and those insights are so important. You know, in salvation you receive justification, the righteousness of Christ is imputed to your account. That is to say God treats you as if you lived Christ's life, though you didn't. He does it by grace purely through your faith. But at that point it does not mean that you can therefore say, "I am a perfectly righteous person, I don't need anything else." No. The righteousness of Christ has been put to your account as if you lived His perfect life, though you didn't. And now you need to bring your life into line with that wonderful gracious gift. You have been declared righteous, that's salvation, justification. And now you need to pursue righteousness in sanctification. Very important. And what that means is...Yes, I am as righteous as Christ in justification at salvation, by imputation; but I long to be as righteous as Christ in my sanctification. That's exactly what Paul was saying when he said, "I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." What was that he...what is the prize of the high calling? Well when you're called up high, what's the prize? To be like Christ. Paul says that's the prize and that's the goal, I want to be like Christ. Paul said to the Galatians, "I am travail until Christ

is fully formed in you."

"Oh to be like Thee, dear Jesus, my plea, just to know Thou art formed fully in me." That's the issue. So that in your Christian life you continue to pursue the righteousness manifest in Jesus Christ. And we all know we haven't attained it. Paul says, "Not as though I have attained...Philippians 3...but I pursue it...I pursue it."

There's a certain...certain ambivalence in which as a believer I am totally content with my justification and utterly discontent with my sanctification. Understand that?

Now what is the result? Well the result is given in verse 6, "They shall be satisfied...and blessed." The pursuit of righteousness brings satisfaction. If you pursue it you'll receive it. "They shall be satisfied" is a literal word for feeding animals, foddering them so that they're full, satisfying them. When you come to God and you pursue all His righteousness, you get it all. When you are only to be satisfied by His righteousness, He will give it. The verb chortazomeans to be really filled, totally filled. Psalm 107:9 says, "For He satisfies the longing soul and fills the hungry soul with goodness." Psalm 34:10 says, "Those that seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing." And what did the psalmist say? "The Lord is my Shepherd...what's the next line?...I shall not want." And later on he says, "My cup runs over."

Jeremiah 31:14, Jeremiah said, "My people shall be satisfied with My goodness, saith the Lord." "You'll be blessed," Ephesians 1, "with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus." "You'll be able to do exceeding abundantly above all you can ask or think." You will have all the fullness of Christ dwelling in you, all the riches and treasures of the Godhead are in Him and all that He is dwells in you. That's what it means to be satisfied. You are seeking the righteousness of Christ to be imputed to you in salvation, you will receive it. You are seeking to be conformed to the image of Christ in sanctification, as you pursue that God will graciously grant that to you until one day when you will be made like Him for you shall see Him as He is, 1 John 3:2. Therein comes the happiness.

Now finally, a personal question. How do I know if I'm really hungering and thirsting for righteousness? How do I do a little inventory here? A few questions, you can answer them for yourself. Number one, are you dissatisfied with yourself? Are you really a person who says, "O wretched man that I am," Romans 7? Do you feel a constant falling short? Do you feel a constant gnawing, nagging pain because you always fall short? Are you more grieved because you know God is dishonored than because you know your marriage person is distressed over your actions or words or attitudes? Are you more concerned about the divine implications of your failures than you are the human ones? The question is, are you dissatisfied with yourself? And anyone who is really pursuing righteousness, anyone who is a kingdom child is going to answer, "Yes, I understand that dissatisfaction."

And, you know, as you grow as a Christian you will have a greater hunger for righteousness because the more mature you become as a believer, the greater your sin will appear to you and the more dissatisfied you'll become. It's really a strange thing to live. The longer you're a Christian, the longer you're walking faithfully with the Lord, the more sin decreases. But even though there may be less frequent sin, it is more heinous to you because you have cultivated such lofty longings.

Second question, do you find that external things don't satisfy you? Do you find increasingly that things bear little influence on how you feel? There was a time in your life when it was very important to have certain things and achieve certain things, satisfy certain goals. But have you found that as you have continued to pursue righteousness and to hunger and thirst after righteousness, things have little influence? If things fill you up and satisfy you so that you don't have an appetite for righteousness, you may be in a serious condition. If you take flowers to a hungry man, it doesn't help. If you take a violin to a hungry man and play him a tune, it doesn't help. If you give him pleasant conversation, it doesn't help. Nothing will fill him but food. And a thirsty man doesn't want a melody and he doesn't want a rose, he wants a drink. You have to ask yourself the question...can I be satisfied with external things?

Third question, do I have a great appetite for the Word? I think that's a fair question. If you want to know whether you're hungering and thirsting after righteousness, do you long to be in the Word? Do you love the truth of God? Do you love the Scripture? Do you love to read the Word of God? Do you love to read about the Word of God? Do you have this longing to increase your knowledge of God so that you might in knowing Him more be able to emulate Him?

Another question, are the things of God precious to you? Does the Lord taste gracious? Do you find yourself having tasted that the Lord is good, as Peter put it, and you can't get enough?

Is your...another question, is your hunger and thirst unconditional...absolutely unconditional? "Lord, I just...I just want Your righteousness, I want Your character in my life whatever the price?" Psalm 119:20, "My soul breaks for the longing that it has to Your judgments." Literally, just...I'm just crumbling out of desperation. Isaiah said 26:9, "With my soul have I desired you in the night, yea with my spirit within me shall I seek you early." Psalm 63, David's thirst for God was early. There's just a compelling, just a passion.

This is a very basic thing here and it's a place to do the most strategic and the most essential inventory in your own heart. If there's any question about your longing for righteousness, if you're finding yourself saying no when you ask...do I really hunger and thirst after righteousness...it may well be that you're not a Christian, you've never really come to the place where you have matched this entrance requirement. Or it may be that you are a Christian who has drifted so far from the priorities, so far from the warmth of proper spiritual response that you've allowed yourself to become enamored

with perishing things. In either case, an inventory is appropriate in which you examine your condition and set your life right before God.

Become merciful, pure in heart and a peacemaker and for it you'll get persecuted. That's the pattern. Praise the Lord, huh? Well, we'll keep it for a couple of Sunday nights from now. Join me in prayer.

We continually are overwhelmed, our God, at the immensity of the treasure of Scripture. We...we can't even touch the surface of all that could be said about the rich concept of hungering and thirsting after righteousness and being satisfied. Lord, how I pray that what is said has been clear, captivating, compelling, convicting and brought us all to a real honest examination of our hearts. Lord, we all admit we are...we are hungering for a righteousness we know we don't have, only if You grant us Christ's righteousness in justification and if You by Your Spirit conform us to His image in sanctification can the hunger be satisfied. But those are holy longings, those are righteous aspirations that belong to kingdom people. Father, make it clear in our minds that we might examine ourselves and that we might help others to understand as well these profound penetrating words of our Savior Himself in whose name we ask. Amen.

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