

The Joy of Desiring God

Matthew 5:6

March 4, 2018

Review:

Humility (poor in spirit)

Oh the joy of the one who has realized his utter helplessness and put his whole trust in God alone—theirs is the kingdom of heaven!

Brokenness (mourn)

Oh the joy of the one who is so broken over his sin that in godly sorrow he turns in true repentance to Jesus and discovers the comfort and joy of being forgiven!

Meekness

Oh the Joy of the one who is so secure in Christ as one who will one day inherit the earth, that he is free to respond to all people with the humility and self-control of meekness.

Today we are going to be focusing on vs. 6: *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be satisfied.”*

I want to remind you this morning that Jesus has a radical focus on the heart—have you noticed that? Humility, brokenness (grieving over sin), meekness, these are all matters of the heart. And what’s important for us to see in vs. 6 is that righteousness is also a matter of the heart. This is a remarkable contrast to the perspective of the Pharisees who tended to make righteousness about the externals—not only keeping the law, and all the additional rules and regulations they had set up around the law. They thought of themselves as righteous because they tithed (even their spices), fasted, and made an impression when they prayed in public. Many of us may be tempted to also want to reduce righteousness down to externals....

But Jesus is showing us that the kingdom of God is a matter of the heart. Not that externals don’t matter, but that the value of what we say and do is

determined by our hearts and not just our actions. Jesus said, “A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit...For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting *and* wickedness, *as well as* deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride *and* foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man. (Matt 7:18; Mark 7:21-23).

The beatitudes describe what a heart looks like that is under the rule and reign of God. It is humble—not self-sufficient. It grieves over sin instead of celebrating it or defending it. It is meek rather than self-exalting.

Today we are going to discover that a heart under God’s rule and reign also hungers and thirsts for righteousness. But what do we mean by righteousness? Later in the NT, Paul gives us a more technical understanding of righteousness in two important senses.

1. *Righteousness that saves.*

This is a positional righteousness, it establishes our position or status before God. Theologians call this *imputed righteousness* or you might think of it as in-putted righteousness. This righteousness does not originate with you. It is given to you as a gift in the person of Jesus Christ. Paul speaks of this righteousness in Phil 3 when he said he was willing to relinquish trust in anything he had done to have Christ, *“not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith”* (Phil 3:10). So this is not a righteousness we offer to God, but one God gives to us as we trust in Christ.

2. *Righteousness that sanctifies.*

We might call this practical righteousness or personal holiness. This has to do with living our day to day lives in manner that is consistent with our new status before God. Living our lives in daily obedience out of a desire to please the Lord because we love Him.

Personal righteousness is another way of talking about sanctification and it is the closest sense to which the OT used the term righteousness—right living before God, doing what is right in God’s eyes as a reflection of His character.

I’m not suggesting that we should take Paul’s technical usage of righteousness and fully read it back into the words of Jesus (that would be a bit of an overreach), but if we look closely we will see the parallel. Here’s what you need to understand. You cannot have a growing sense of personal righteousness until you have been given the gift of positional righteousness. In other words, we need to be made right with God, given a new heart, made one with Christ, before we can express it and grow in it.

When Jesus talks about a righteousness that is humble and broken over sin, when He talks about meekness in how we relate to other people, He is talking about a righteousness lived out in our day to day lives. Yet, before a heart can function this way under the rule and reign of God, it must be transformed by the grace of God. A sinner’s heart is in rebellion against God, not submitting to His reign. How else could Jesus describe those in His kingdom as pure in heart (vs 8) short of a transformation by His grace?

So Jesus is talking about those who long for their lives to agree with the change that God’s grace has made in them. They not only want what God wants for their lives, and character, and relationships, but also long for God’s rule and reign to be pervasive in all the earth, not just their own lives.

What does it mean to hunger and thirst for righteousness?

It means to long for our lives and hearts to be right with God, like our bodies crave food. We’re not talking about the kind of hunger that we can shake off with a mid-afternoon snack or the kind of thirst quenched by our 3rd cup of coffee. In Jesus day, people lived much closer to the edge of starvation than we do today. Hunger was true hunger, not psychological hunger driven by the noon whistle. The spiritual hunger Jesus is referring to is for a righteousness that we not only want, but that is essential to living life.

There’s something else here I want to draw your attention to. It’s a surprising and striking detail that can only be detected in the Greek grammar. Normally, if someone said, I want some bread or I want a drink, it would be in the partitive genitive. That simply means, that it would be I want a part of it, I want a piece of bread, a drink of water. But here Jesus uses the accusative case which changes the sense to wanting the whole—I want all the bread, all the water.

This is significant because Jesus is saying that those who will be blessed with satisfaction are those who hunger and thirst for complete righteousness, not just some righteousness. So many believers are prone to live this way. We tend to be selective in our pursuit of righteousness. We want just enough righteousness in our lives to feel good about ourselves, but we are willing to leave some aspects of our flesh unconquered. For example, we may have overcome our addiction or our bad language, but do we have the same urge to overcome judgmental attitudes, or struggles with lust, or impatience? So often we are ok with a few shadows in our life, just so long as the majority of our life measures up to acceptable Christianity in our culture. But Jesus is describing the one who wants all of life to be transformed, leaving no attitudes, thoughts, desires, or behaviors untouched by the light of Christ.

Perhaps it would be helpful to stop and compare the one who doesn’t hunger and thirst for righteousness to the one who does.

The one who doesn’t hunger and thirst for righteousness is the one who, even when he knows he is misaligned with God, doesn’t care about it. He isn’t bothered by selfish or sinful attitudes.

- This person is not poor in spirit (5:3). He is not desperate for God’s grace and mercy.
- He does not grieve over his sin (5:4), but feeds it and celebrates it.
- He is not meek, but rather self-seeking (5:5).

On the other hand, ***the one who hungers and thirsts for righteousness is the one who, when he sees where he falls short of what God wants in his desires, attitudes, or actions, has an ache in his soul for his heart and life***

to finally be right with God. His daily struggle to live rightly before God and other people makes him homesick for heaven. As a result the one who longs for righteousness is poor in spirit, desperate for God's grace and mercy day by day. He grieves over his sin and increasingly relates to people with the humility of meekness.

This is the one Jesus says will be satisfied. So let's talk about what it means to be satisfied. First, its important to say that a longing for righteousness comes out of a deep desire for God Himself. Righteousness is not an end in itself. The goal is not to be righteous but to enjoy unhindered delight in God and to experience his favor, because we love Him. To be like Him in our character and therefore enjoying His delight in us.

Why do little boys want to be like their dad? Because they love their dad. He has a singular, treasured place in his life. In the same way, children of God want to be righteous like their Father because they love their Father.

So we could say that to hunger and thirst for righteousness is to hunger and thirst for God Himself. So why didn't Jesus just say, "blessed are those who hunger and thirst for God, for they shall be satisfied?" I think its because our hearts are deceitful and we could think that we are pursuing God by being a religious person when in fact we are building a spiritual façade. Whether or not we truly long for righteousness to pervade our lives is the test of whether we truly desire God. (**Isa. 29:13** – *"this people come near to Me with their mouth and honor Me with their lips but their hearts are far from Me."*)

So if a desire for righteousness is truly birthed out of a desire and love for God Himself, then to be satisfied is to be satisfied in God. And **to be satisfied in God is to not need anything more than God to be satisfied.**

Illus: Its about 9:15 pm and I begin wandering around my house. I open the fridge and find the leftovers. I take a spoon take one dip of leftovers, but it doesn't quite hit the spot so I get another spoon and take one scoop of crunchy peanut butter and take a bite. But before I take the second bite, I grab the honey and pour a little bit on top and then savor the sweet, and

creamy taste. But I'm not quite satisfied, so I finally give in and head downstairs to get the ice cream. In an ideal world I would then take snickers bar and slice it up into my ice cream. After eating my ice cream, I set the bowl aside and say to myself, "I'm satisfied." What does "I'm satisfied" mean? It means I don't have to keep wandering. I am content. I don't need anything beyond that ice cream to fulfill my desire (in that moment). What a first-world problem!

When it comes to spiritual hunger, *to be satisfied is to have God and need nothing beyond Him for my soul to be content.* When we are satisfied, we stop wandering!

(By the way, finding our satisfaction in God alone doesn't meant we stop enjoying things like food, and sports, and friendship, but rather that we experience the joy and satisfaction of God in those things because we receive them as blessing from God and opportunities in which to please God)

So why does God satisfy those who hunger and thirst for righteousness?

- He Himself is righteous.

Psalm 145:17 – *"The LORD is righteous in all His ways"*

- He loves righteousness!

Psalm 33:1-5 – *"Sing for joy in the Lord, O you righteous ones...for the word of the Lord is upright...He loves righteousness and justice"*

Psalm 11:7 – *"For the LORD is righteous; He loves righteousness; The upright will behold His face."*

- Our desire for righteousness is born out of our love for God Himself.

And so He satisfies those who long to be like Him because they love Him.

What characterizes a life that hunger and thirst for righteousness?

We have already seen that the person who seeks righteousness will be characterized by the a growing display of the other beatitudes. For example, if we pursue righteousness, we can expect that we would increasingly display mercy and a pure heart and want to strive for peace in our relationships as a peacemaker. All the positive qualities of the beatitudes would be expected to show in the life of someone pursuing righteousness.

Let me offer a few more marks of those who hunger and thirst for righteousness¹:

- ***Dissatisfaction with self*** – If we are happy with the way we are, regardless of our sinful patterns, we will see no need for God’s righteousness to be displayed in our lives.
- ***Not enslaved to pursuing satisfaction in external things*** – *the person who longs for righteousness is seeking satisfaction in God rather than things of the world.*
- ***Delight in the things of God*** – Because a longing for righteousness comes out of a desire and love for God Himself, it leads to a delight in all that is true of God and His ways, including those things that are contrary to the natural desires of our flesh, like humility, and correction.
- ***Unconditional discipleship*** – *When our spiritual hunger is genuine, we will not make excuses or set conditions on obedience to God.*
- ***Craving for the Word of God*** - This is not only a mark of one who hungers for righteousness, but is the very means by which he is both made to be hunger and then the means by which he pursues the satisfaction of that hunger. The Scriptures reveal the righteousness of God and at the same time expose our unrighteousness. As we respond to what we see with repentance and faith, our lives increasingly reflect the righteousness of Christ in daily life.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied!” ***Oh the joy of the one, who out of whole-hearted love for God, longs for all of life to be right with God and pleasing to God, for He shall be satisfied in God alone!***

This morning as we come to the Lord’s table, I urge you to take an inventory of your internal life. Perhaps there’s an area of life where you have been neglecting the pursuit of righteousness. You haven’t wanted to surrender that particular aspect of life to God. Maybe an area of lust or pride, or a particular relationship or habit? Sometimes we forget to consider how God wants to be reshaping attitudes of the heart that come so naturally to us. Or perhaps there is something you keep seeking pleasure in outside of God.

I encourage you to pray for God to give you a hunger and thirst for righteousness in all of life—to want to align your heart, life, and relationships with God unconditionally.

And as you turn from your sin, as you turn from your pursuit of self-righteousness or your idolatry of seeking satisfaction in something or someone other than God, He stands ready to not only forgive you, but to give you the satisfaction that can only be found in Him.

Communion:

- **Bread**: – *“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men...But God demonstrates His own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us”* (Rom 1:18; 5:8).
- **Cup**: 2 Cor 5:21

****Congregational Meeting after service!***

¹ The following marks adapted from John MacArthur, *The MacArthur NT Commentary: Matthew 1-7*, pg. 184.