



## World Christian Fellowship

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### Beatitude 05- Blessed are hunger and thirst.

**Matthew 5:3-10**, *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup>Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted. <sup>5</sup>Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth. <sup>6</sup>Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled. <sup>7</sup>Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy. <sup>8</sup>Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God. <sup>9</sup>Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God. <sup>10</sup>Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

The world says it is the proud, the tough, and the aggressive who inherit the earth. It is the survival of the fittest. But Christ says the meek will inherit the land. It is a paradoxical statement, just as the other Beatitudes are.

The Beatitudes begin and end with “for the kingdom of heaven belongs to them.” If these characteristics are not in our lives, however imperfectly, we are not part of the kingdom of heaven.

In one sense, we can all relate to this passage of Scripture – we all hunger. We may not be able to know the depth of hunger the people of this time were going through, but we experience a daily hunger that comes back and needs to be satisfied.

### **Righteousness:**

The Greek word “*dikaosune*” means to be “right” with God. It was a word that was used in ancient literature to describe a person who kept the commands of God and did the “right” thing both before God and man.

He would be known as a “righteous” man. Someone who was “right” with God and man. It is in our hearts to want to be in “right” standing before God and others.

The one who is “hungry for righteousness” is the person who has a hunger to get back right with God, so that there is nothing “hanging over your head” in your relationship with Him.

That person is “blessed”, Jesus says, because his hunger will lead him to do what it takes to get “right” with God again.

### **Restlessness and Longing.**

**Ecclesiastes 3:11**, *He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.*

What does this mean, that God has put eternity in man's mind and yet has withheld from us the vision of what he has done from everlasting to everlasting?

God has put eternity in our hearts, and we have an inconsolable longing.

We try to satisfy it with scenic vacations, accomplishments of creativity, stunning cinematic productions, sexual exploits, national sports extravaganzas, hallucinogenic drugs, ascetic rigors, managerial excellence, etc., etc. But the longing remains.

**Isaiah 55:2–3**, *Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And let your soul delight itself in abundance. <sup>3</sup>Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you—The sure mercies of David.*

**Jeremiah 2:12–13**, *Be astonished, O heavens, at this, And be horribly afraid; Be very desolate," says the Lord. <sup>13</sup>"For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, And hewn themselves cisterns broken cisterns that can hold no water.*

Your soul is hungry, and your heart is thirsty.

You feel an insatiable longing for something.

You are restless.

Almost everywhere you turn, the grass is greener than where you stand.

The great tragedy for some of you is that even though this is the Spirit of God summoning you to Himself, you turn away again and again to short-run, temporary, backfiring pleasures of movies, or drugs or alcohol or tanning parlours or a new toy.

Everything turns to ashes in your hands. The thrill of lust leaves the sediment of guilt and loneliness. The drugs and alcohol cannot keep you from waking up in the real world again and again with your messed-up relationships. The tan looks so artificial and fades so quickly. And the new toy is so boring in just a few weeks.

We drink at broken cisterns. We eat bread that does not satisfy.

If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.

A great illustration of this is the story of the prodigal son.

**Luke 15:11-32.**

He took the inheritance his father had given him, left home, and went to a far-off country where he squandered his inheritance money on riotous living, on things that would not satisfy.

He was far too easily pleased and fooled into thinking that this was what life was all about, only to fall short. When he had a lot of money, he had a lot of friends and parties. But when the money was gone, so were his friends. At this point in time, he begins to “go down hill” in a major way, to the point of living with pigs and eating the slop they ate.

To be hungry is not enough.

I must be really starving to know what is in His heart towards me.

When the prodigal son was hungry, he went to feed upon husks, but when he was starving, he turned to his father.

**Jesus Has Something to Say About Longing**

Jesus has something to say to us this morning about this universal experience of an inconsolable longing.

**Matthew 5:6**, *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”*

What I would like to do is simply meditate with you on two things:

- Nature of the righteousness,
- Nature of our hunger and thirst for it, and
- Satisfaction Jesus promises.

**What is the righteousness?**

*“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.”*

Last week we explained the meaning of meekness by going back to **Psalms 37:11**. The reason was that Jesus seemed to be quoting that psalm almost verbatim in **Matthew 5:5**. Besides that, the word “meekness” does not occur again in the Sermon on the Mount.

But today’s Beatitude is not a quote from the Old Testament and the word “righteousness” occurs five times in this sermon.

**Matthew 5:6**, *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”*

**Matthew 5:10**, *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

**Matthew 5:20**, *For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.*

**Matthew 6:1**, *“Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.*

**Matthew 6:33**, *But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*

So, the best way to catch on to Jesus’s meaning in this sermon is to look at these other instances of the word righteousness.

### **Persecuted for Righteousness.**

**Matthew 5:10**, *“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*

What does righteousness mean here when it says, “persecuted for righteousness’ sake”?

### **The Beatitude’s Structure**

To answer this, it helps to see the structure of the Beatitudes.

There are eight Beatitudes.

1. Blessed are the poor in spirit.

2. Blessed are they that mourn.
3. Blessed are the meek
4. Blessed are hunger and thirst after righteousness.
5. Blessed are the merciful
6. Blessed are the peacemakers.
7. Blessed are persecuted for righteousness.
8. Blessed are the pure in heart.

Verse 10 is the last one and verse 11 as an expansion of it.

The first Beatitude (**V 3**) and the last Beatitude (**V 10**) give the same words of assurance: *“For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*

It is like a sandwich: the top piece of bread and the bottom piece of bread both say, “Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Yet there are two groups of four.

The first group of four and

The second group of four.

The first group of four ends with **verse 6**: *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.”*

The second group of four ends with **verse 10**: *“Blessed are those who are persecuted the sake of righteousness.”*

The first three Beatitudes leading up to hunger for righteousness in verse 6 are descriptions of emptiness.

Poverty-stricken in spirit (verse 3),

Mourning over our sin (verse 4),

Meekness when criticised (verse 5).

These are not characteristics of overflowing fullness. They are beautiful and good in their proper place, but they are not yet the richness and fullness and overflowing activity of goodness that we long for.

So, is not it natural that following these first three Beatitudes the Lord would say, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness” — who long to be filled with righteousness?

In other words, after pronouncing a blessing upon those who recognize their emptiness and grieve over it and do not try to justify or defend themselves, Jesus now makes a transition from emptiness to fullness by saying that hunger and thirst for righteousness is also blessed.

### **Fullness and Persecution**

The next three Beatitudes.

After hunger and satisfaction.

**Verse 7**, *“Blessed are the merciful”*.

Now the blessed person is full and overflowing in mercy. He is not merely broken and sorrowful and meek. He is now active and overflowing with deeds of mercy.

**Verse 8** says that he is pure in heart.

**Verse 9** says that he is not just peaceful, but a peacemaker.

Then this second group of four Beatitudes ends with another reference to righteousness. Only this time it is not a hunger for righteousness which we were lacking, but a persecution for righteousness with which we are overflowing.

### **A Definition of Righteousness**

The first four Beatitudes describe the broken, grieving, quiet person who hungers and thirsts for righteousness.

The second four Beatitudes describe the merciful, pure peacemaker who gets persecuted for his righteousness.

This structure gives us the definition of righteousness.

If we were hungering for righteousness in verse 6 because we were empty, and then we get persecuted for righteousness in verse 10 because we have been filled.

It is proper to define righteousness as that with which we have been filled, mercy, purity, and peace-making.

## Righteousness Exceeding That of the Pharisees

Let us look at one other use of “righteousness” in the sermon to see if it confirms this understanding.

**Matthew 5:20**, *For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.*

That is the very point of the whole Sermon on the Mount. The scribes and Pharisees claimed to be righteous, but they were self-righteous thinking they would gain entrance because of their genealogical heritage and religious works. However, it does not matter what your blood line is or how pious your parents, you must answer to God for yourself and the soul that sins will die.

They did a lot of things they thought were righteous deeds that would earn them favour with God. But they forgot that **Isaiah 64:6** plainly states that man’s righteous works are as a filthy garment before the Lord God. Righteousness is not gained by good works.

Then what follows in the rest of chapter 5 are **six illustrations** of how our righteousness must surpass the righteousness of the scrupulous law keepers of the day.

**In verses 21–26**, we must not only not kill, but we must not sustain anger against a brother but seek peace.

**In verses 27–30**, we must not only not commit adultery, but we must not look upon a person lustfully.

**In verses 31–32**, we should not tolerate divorce just because there is a legal provision for it in the Old Testament. We should surpass the righteousness that makes peace with hardness of heart and keep our covenant commitments and not marry those who do not.

**In verses 33–37**, we should not only keep our oaths, but we should be the kind of people who do not need to take oaths in order to be believed.

**In verse 38–42**, we should not only not poke out an eye because one of ours was poked out, but more, we should turn the other cheek and return good for evil.

**In verses 43–48**, we should not only love our neighbour, but we should love our enemy and pray for those who persecute us.

So, it is clear what Jesus meant back in **Matthew 5:20** when He said that our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees.

It has to do with showing mercy,  
being radically pure in your heart, and  
making peace instead of retaliating.

So, our understanding of righteousness from the structure of the Beatitudes is indeed confirmed.

- ✓ Righteousness is showing mercy to other people.
- ✓ Righteousness is being pure in heart before God who alone can see the heart.
- ✓ Righteousness is the effort to make peace.

Now there may be much more to it than that.

## **1. Nature of Our Hunger and Thirst**

The unbeliever hungers and thirsts after the things of this world from a motivation of selfishness even to a quest for personal happiness or the fulfilment of an obligation which is a quest to reduce the unhappiness caused by guilt.

For the believer, the motivation and objective are very different from the unbeliever.

The righteous hunger and thirst for righteousness.

The righteous will be characterized by hungering and thirsting for “the” righteousness. The blessing of being filled comes from the pursuit of that correct goal.

To hunger and thirst for the righteousness is to desire to be in conformity with all the standards that God has set for us.

**Psalms 63:1-3**, *O God, You are my God; Early will I seek You; My soul thirsts for You; My flesh longs for You In a dry and thirsty land Where there is no water. <sup>2</sup>So I have looked for You in the sanctuary, To see Your power and Your glory. <sup>3</sup>Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, My lips shall praise You.*

### **What is God’s standard?**

It is repeated three times in Leviticus and quoted by the Apostle Peter.

**1 Peter 1:16**, *“You shall be holy, for I am holy.”*

The standard to conform to is the very holiness of God. We are to be hungering and thirsting for God’s holiness in our own lives.

Jesus is the example of this standard of righteousness.

**John 14:9**, *Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"*

**Colossians 1:15**, *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.*

**Hebrews 1:3**, *He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,*

**To hunger and thirst for the righteousness is to desire to be like Jesus Christ in your thoughts, actions, and attitudes.**

This is to be a very intense desire.

The double image of both hungering and thirsting intensifies the idea being presented.

This is not just wanting a meal at the end of a hard workday or wanting a better meal because you are tired of what you have been eating.

This is an intense hunger as exists in someone who is adrift in a raft on the sea and has eaten very little for a month or more.

This is the panting of the deer for water that David described.

**Psalm 42:1-2**, *As the deer pants for the water brooks, So pants my soul for You, O God. <sup>2</sup>My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?*

The desire is intense and fills the mind and directs all the efforts made by the body to satisfy that one goal of getting water.

**Is your desire to be like Jesus Christ in personal holiness that intense?**

I pray that it would be!

It needs to be!

That would be overwhelming if this verse stood alone. In fact, it would be impossible because it is contrary to man's natural character.

However, it comes within the sequence of the Beatitudes and so it not only becomes possible, but it is the reasonable expectation of someone who is righteous for it flows out of the previous Beatitudes.

It begins with being poor in Spirit.

It is a crisis of identity in which the proud human comes to grips with his spiritual poverty and is humbled.

He is nothing and has nothing to offer his holy Creator who is self-existent and self-sufficient.

In spiritual destitution he comes as a beggar before God and is granted entrance into the kingdom of heaven. God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.

In learning the truth about sin and righteousness as the Holy Spirit convicts him (**John 16:8**), he mourns over not only his own sin and the affront it is to God, but also the sins of others and the curse on the world because of sin. He finds comfort in being redeemed by Christ and forgiven his own sins.

He finds comfort in having the hope of the gospel to give others and the hope of the future redemption of this currently cursed world. These truths push him further to developing the character of meekness as he commits himself to following the Lord whatever the circumstances because there is an increasing love and trust of Him.

His reward will be reigning with Christ when He establishes His millennial kingdom.

Hungering and thirsting after the righteousness arises from these other qualities in the logical response of now also

turning from self-fulfilment and self-protection and toward God in desiring to walk in holiness with Him.

The quest of life changes into wanting to be like Jesus Christ in both thought and deed.

Here are five marks of hungering and thirsting for righteousness.

- a) Dissatisfaction with self. The person who is satisfied with their self-righteousness will see no need for being humble before God.
- b) Freedom from dependence on external things for satisfaction. Earthly things no longer satisfy the hunger.
- c) A craving for the Word of God and to be in prayer. The Bible and prayer are our source of nourishment.
- d) Finding pleasure in the things of God in all circumstances.
- e) Unconditional desire for righteousness – a longing for it no matter how God chooses to provide it.

## **2. Being Filled with Righteousness**

The wonderful blessing is the promise in the factual statement that those that do hunger and thirst after righteousness will be filled.

This is an extremely important blessing because unless you are righteous you cannot enter heaven.

**Hebrews 12:14**, *Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord:*

To some that seems too difficult because being holy means being perfect. No one can be perfect!

That is correct.

Holiness demands perfection and no one can meet those qualifications on their own. That is why this is preceded by being poor in spirit, mourning and being meek. Only God can make you holy and that is exactly what He does in Jesus Christ.

As Paul explains in the book of Romans, no one is righteous before God.

- The immoral (**Romans 1:18-1:32**),
- The moral (**Romans 2:1-16**), and
- The religious (**Romans 2:17-3:8**)

Are all unrighteous and guilty before Him (**Romans 3:9-23**).

**Romans 3:24-27**, *being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,<sup>25</sup> whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to*

*demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed,<sup>26</sup> to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.<sup>27</sup> Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith.<sup>28</sup> Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.*

**Romans 10:9-10,** *That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.<sup>10</sup> For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*

**2 Corinthians 5:21,** *For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*

Those who hunger and thirst for the righteousness will be filled with it by God through faith in Jesus.

Some react to this and say that is too easy.

Well, it is easy in the sense salvation comes by grace through faith as a gift of God and not through any works lest any man should boast.

It is easy in the sense that you cannot earn it.

At the same time, it is not easy.

Because it goes against the natural pride of mankind. This requires a man to humble himself and become poor in spirit in order to come to God begging for His mercy and grace, which He gladly grants in Christ.

Any man who tries to attain salvation on his own merit is not saved and will not enter the kingdom of God.

While we are made righteous before God by His grace through **justification** by our faith in Jesus Christ, hungering and thirsting after righteousness does not end there.

We are saved from sin and made righteous in our position before God at the moment of justification, but we are also being made practically righteous in our manner of living in the present through the **process of sanctification**.

We become more and more like Jesus Christ in character by continued hungering and thirsting after righteousness, being meek, mourning over sin and being poor in spirit.

The ultimate fulfilment of this Beatitude will be when our positional holiness and practical holiness meet, and we are conformed to the image of Christ in perfect holiness. That will be **our glorification**.

That is the hope of God's promise that not only will He continue the good work He has started in us (**Philippians 1:6**), but that He will conform us to the image of His Son on the day of Christ Jesus.

## **Conclusion:**

We hunger and thirst for that day!

When we hunger and thirst for righteousness, we do not look to the broken cisterns of our own resources. We look to God. We hunger for righteousness in God.

But there is a deeper reason why Jesus promises satisfaction to those who hunger for God's righteousness instead of promising satisfaction to those who simply hunger for God. The Sermon on the Mount ends in

**Matthew 7:22–23.** *Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?'<sup>23</sup> And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'*

They called him Lord.

They seemed to have the charismatic gift of prophesy.

They were engaged in exorcisms of demons and miracles in Jesus's name.

Jesus turned them away at the last day saying he never knew them, because they were doers of evil and not righteousness.

They thought they knew him.

They thought he knew them.

But they were strangers: "I never knew you."

### **Why?**

Because they had not hungered and thirsted for his righteousness. They had been religious! They had gone to church. They had gotten involved in many religious activities. But the passion, the hunger, the thirst of their lives was not righteousness. And therefore, they will not be satisfied, neither in this age nor in the age to come.

Deep and lasting satisfaction for our souls comes not from the delights of the world nor from a merely religious or vertical relationship with God. Satisfaction comes from God to those whose passion in life is to know him in the struggle to be like him in the world.

**Make Righteousness Your Passion and Be Satisfied**

Make it the passion and the hunger and the thirst of your life to do great acts of righteousness.

It is never too late to change your diet. Do you plan to eat tomorrow?

Then why not plan to eat righteousness?

Do you plan to drink tomorrow?

Then why not plan to drink righteousness?

**1 John 3:2**, *“Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is.”*