

The Sermon on the Mount

DEVOTIONAL STUDIES FROM THE
MEN'S MORNING FELLOWSHIP

Matthew 5:6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
For they shall be filled.

We are ascending the mount upon which Jesus sat. The beatitudes are the foundation, then the steps, that lead to sitting where Jesus sat. Each beatitude furthers our understanding of what traits and characteristics describe every Christian.

We are being conformed, day-by-day, into the image of Jesus by the indwelling Holy Spirit. These beatitudes describe what we are like when we are Christ-like.

In the previous beatitudes, we've been looking within, examining ourselves. We've seen our poverty of spirit; we've mourned over our struggle with sin; we've seen how that we should represent ourselves with meekness toward others.

This next step describes an appetite that is present within every believer.

Blessed, you recall, means something like, *O how happy and to be envied*. You will be happy, and you are to be envied, if you **hunger and thirst after righteousness**.

What is this **righteousness**? The way I like to think of **righteousness** is being right with God.

You are born *wrong* with God; you are born dead in trespasses and sins; you are born a rebel in a war against God.

You are more wrong than you might think:

1. You are wrong before you are ever conceived because sin is imputed to the entire human race. It is a legal concept; a banking term. It means to put something into your account; it means to credit your account. It's not the kind of credit you want, though. Because Adam represented you in the Garden of Eden, when he sinned, his sin was credited to you. You're bankrupt as to righteousness – but you're endowed with sin!
2. You are wrong at conception because sin is inherited. Sin altered Adam and Eve's humanity. God said that the moment they ate of the forbidden tree, they would die. And they did. They died spiritually. They also began to die physically. Sin is in our DNA, so to speak.
3. You are wrong in life because you commit individual acts of sin. Try as you might to live right, you always do wrong along the way.

How can you ever be right with God when you are so wrong?

Well, you can't earn it... Or deserve it. Your 'wrongness' is too extensive for you to be able to do anything about it on your own. No other mere human can help you, either.

God must do something to make you right. But it cannot be anything out of character for Him. He cannot simply overlook your sin. Sin cannot be cancelled-out. It must be accounted for.

God became a man in order to take your place for the punishment of sin. Because He was man, He can represent you. Because He was God, He can help you.

Jesus takes your sin upon Himself and pays its punishment. Jesus gives you His righteousness; you are thus declared righteous by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Righteousness is deposited into your account, so to speak. Sin is transferred out.

What we've been describing is salvation. There is more to righteousness. Righteousness extends throughout your life in the

process we call *sanctification*. It is the practice of righteousness on a daily basis.

Though you have a position of being right with God, you don't always practice it. You struggle, remember, within. So this beatitude is really about your day-to-day, practical righteousness, or your right-living.

Living right, which means according to God's Word and God's will, is compared to the appetites of **hunger** and **thirst**. The first thing the comparison suggests to me is that this is something that happens to me somewhat automatically.

Here is what I mean. Physically speaking, I do not need to learn to be hungry and thirsty. They are part of my nature as a human being.

Just so, spiritual hunger and thirst are part of my new nature as a spiritual creation in Jesus Christ. As Peter said, I will desire God's Word as a new-born baby desires milk.

As a brand-new believer, I experienced the appetite of this beatitude.

1. We couldn't wait to get to Church. We would leave Church and go out to lunch to discuss everything we had just been told. Everything was intensely satisfying, but left us hungering for more.
2. I bought a book by Tim LaHaye called, *How to Study the Bible for Yourself*. In it he suggested books for a basic Christian library. I asked for all of them from my relatives at my next birthday!
3. Every Sunday I would get the tape of the message. Since I drove a lot in my job as an outside salesman, I had time to listen to the study two or three times or more during the week.

What can happen to your physical appetite? If you have kids, you know what can happen. **An appetite can be spoiled by eating junk food!** I can even make myself sick – either immediately, or over a long period of time – by ingesting improper foods.

Because we are talking about spiritual appetites, there are any number of things that *can* and *do* compete for my ingesting. Some I cannot avoid, e.g., those things that involve my work or other responsibilities. Other things assault me whether I like it or not. And some things I (sadly) choose over spiritual food that would be better for me.

Having said that, we should concentrate on a proper spiritual diet. Why do regular diets fail?

1. For one thing, they are often geared to a particular goal, rather than a lifestyle change. We lose the weight – then gain it right back!
2. Then there are fad diets that come and go.
3. Diets fail when exercise is not part of the program.
4. Dieting can also lead to depression. Imagine being on a diet this Thanksgiving!

There are spiritual counterparts to those points:

1. Our spiritual goals should be long-term. We should think in terms of our entire lifetime on earth – not just, say, 40-days of purpose!
2. Fads sweep through the Church. Folks get all excited about them; then they go right back to their old habits.
3. Exercise, in the form of serving others in the body of Christ, must be involved in keeping a healthy appetite.
4. Too often we are depressed because we're not enjoying the total feast of God's Word.

The beatitude... the blessing I am promised... Is that I **shall be filled**. It means my appetite for righteousness can be satisfied. It can be satisfied again and again.

It sounds like circular reasoning, but I can be satisfied if I hunger and thirst after righteousness; and I know I am hungering and thirsting after righteousness if I am satisfied!

You can compare it to food. I'm going to eat tons of my own, homemade cheesecake for Thanksgiving. I will be full, and satisfied. *But I will still want more when I get hungry again!*

In our studies on the beatitudes, we like to show how Jesus not only taught them, but exemplified them. In the case of hungering and thirsting after righteousness:

1. The Lord said that His food was to do the will of His Father.
2. He often fasted from food or sleep to spend time with His Father all night in prayer.
3. He submitted to baptism to outwardly fulfill the righteousness required of regular human beings who were sinners – though He was sinless.

God created in you an appetite for spiritual things. Don't bother with junk foods – the world with its vain philosophies of men. Let Him satisfy you again and again until He creates a new heaven and a new earth that are only, always filled with righteousness.



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