

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.Ivor J.W. Oakley (Guisborough Evangelical Church
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Matthew 5:6
(Bible Reading Psalm 27)

Hungering and Thirsting for Righteousness

Introduction

The Beatitudes begin with man in position of humility before God, knowing his spiritual poverty, a beggar, totally dependent on God. Self-importance is all gone. This is the condition needed for receiving all God's blessing. Broken first, then he goes on to mourn and grieve and lament his condition, and what his sin has done in relationship to God and others, the bondage into which he has been brought. Then this causes him to be meek. Submits to God. Not concerned with self and his own righteousness. Leaves all in God's hands. Not concerned to assert himself before others. But meekness does not mean weakness, indeed he can be very straight when wrong is done to others, and he has to uphold claims of God. That man is satisfied, content, at peace.

So now this man, because he submits before God, hungers and thirsts after righteousness. This is the central and summit Beatitude, the key to whole Sermon which is concerned with righteous living. This Beatitude tells us where we can get it. The first three Beatitudes lead up to it – consciousness of mind, humble, grieving, meek. Now seek God's help and righteousness. The result is that he is merciful, pure in heart and a peacemaker, and this leads to persecution. Go up one side of the mountain to the summit (5:6), then down other side.

That person who hungers and thirsts after righteousness, is truly blessed and happy. The only truly happy people are the righteous. Whole world is seeking after happiness. This lies behind men's ambitions and leisure and entertainment and planning. Always seeking but never finding. According to this Beatitude, if seeking happiness, we shall fail. It never comes when sought, for it comes from something else, as a by-product. We are not to seek for happiness or even religious experience. **Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well** (Matt. 6:33). Very demanding but also very challenging Beatitude, and also very heart-warming Beatitude.

What is this Righteousness?

Very common Biblical word and used in several ways. When we are justified by faith, Christ's perfect righteousness is put to our account and we are accepted for that. But note that these words are spoken to people already believers – disciples. And also note how "righteousness" is used in Matthew's Gospel.

Inner righteousness of heart and mind and motive. Not vague morality, doing decent thing and being generous and helpful (all very important). But much more important to be conformed to God's will, life well pleasing to God, life in which God's kingdom, glory and will come first, commandments obeyed in spirit and not letter.

This inner righteousness leads to a life that is outwardly right in dealings with others. Marked by a desire to be free from sin and its power in all its forms, free from desire to sin, free from self – self-concern, boasting, self-importance, glorifying and protecting self, relying on self. Positively holy, displaying fruits of the Spirit in actions and life, behaving as now person in Christ, conformed to his image. Supreme desire to know God and to be in fellowship with him and walk with him. Living as Christ did when he was on earth, in total conformity to God’s will. The moment we say that, we realize how it is totally beyond us. We can fussily tidy up this and that to improve outward appearance and at same time fill self with pride inwardly – but this is not what Jesus is talking about. Here is something beyond reach. No point in looking to self and own efforts – just wasting time. Again we face humiliating fact that we are bankrupt. So we must turn to the source, where this is to be found and consider the conditions of receiving.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst

Hunger and thirst – we do not know much about that. Jesus’ hearers did. Many of them were often on the borderline between real hunger and actual starvation. As for thirst, they had no convenient tap for clear running water when thirsty in intense heat, or when devastating sandstorms caused near suffocation. Jesus was not talking about needing that mid-morning snack or third cup of tea. Jesus is talking about being desperate, in real pain, deep longing, being in agony, restlessness, dreaming and longing. Controlling passion of life. Here is man starving for food because stomach is empty. Here is a man who is going to die unless thirst is relieved.

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God (Psalm 42:1,2).

*“Lord Jesus, I long to be perfectly whole,
I want thee forever to live in my soul.
Break down every idol, cast out every foe.
Now wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow”*

Is that us? Do we pant for God? Do we thirst for God? Do we long to be perfectly whole? How much do we want this righteousness, conformity to God’s will and image of his Son? How intense is the desire? Are we seeking with our whole being? How much effort? How much inconvenience and sacrifice are we prepared for? Is this what we want more than anything else in the world?

J.N.Darby “To be hungry is not enough. I must be really starving to know what is in his heart towards me. When the prodigal was hungry, he fed on the husks. But when he was starving, he turned to his father”.

The desire is satisfied

They shall be filled. God says he will work and continue to work in your life. Shall know what it means to say **To live is Christ.** (Phil. 1:21). Life means Christ to me. Keep on being **filled with the Spirit** (Eph. 5:18). Receive from his fullness and receive one experience of grace after another (John 1:16). **More than conquerors through him who loved us** (Romans 8:37). **God who works in you to will and to**

act according to his good purpose (Phil. 2:13). **Strengthened in every good deed and word** (2 Thess. 2:17).

What will he do in my life? Get me out of the rut I am in at present, deliver me from power of sin, cause fruit of the Spirit to grow, enable me to triumph in Christ, enable me to resist the devil. Though not perfect in this life, he can transform me so that I am very different from present situation. Work finally completed in eternity. **We shall be like him for we shall see him as he is** (1 John 3:2). New and perfect man in perfect soul and entirely new body. Work then complete.

Here is paradox of Christian man. Filled and satisfied, yet always hungering and thirsting. The more he is filled, the more he hungers. Blessedness of Christian life. Changed from glory into glory. All of it exalts God's grace. Beneath all Christian life, the satisfaction and the changes it brings, is the grace of God. Basically it all is a gift. The righteousness of Christ, leading us to obey the will of God, is all at root from God's gift. What God demands, he also gives. We are paupers to the end. What is impossible with men is possible with God.

Practical questions arising from text

It is clear that our attitude to this text is an indicator of our spiritual condition. We know we are unwell physically and off-colour when we have little appetite. Equally, we can know when we are unwell spiritually by loss of spiritual appetite. Do we hunger and thirst for God, his will, glory, and earnestly long to live life pleasing and honouring to him? Have we been filled and satisfied? Are the fruit of the Spirit being manifested? Do we enjoy life of God in souls and are we aware of the work of the Holy Spirit forming Christ in us more and more? Are we enjoying Christian life and experience?

Steps to be taken in order to find satisfaction and growth in Christ:

Do we reject all confidence in ourselves? Contented with self. Pat self on the back. Congratulate self. Satisfied with self. If so, we are stuck, and will continue there. Movement only when thoroughly dissatisfied with self and have given up all hope of deliverance from self. Hungry and starving, urgently needing deliverance, and recognizing only hope is in Christ, his grace and his power. No confidence in self but total confidence in him. Therefore yield self and will, without conditions, that he may take and fill me with his Holy Spirit.

Be careful to avoid everything which blunts spiritual appetite – friendship, or TV programme, or habit. Something quite harmless, but may take up too much time and effort, and therefore lose desire for God. So be prepared to discipline self. First things are to come first. Our excuse is we have no time – in truth, we have always time for what we *want* to do.

Put selves in way of God's blessing. Never miss opportunity of being in those places and in that company where hunger or thirst can be satisfied. Bartimaeus was not able to give himself sight but he put himself in place where Christ was, who could help him.

Live in God's word. Do I spend as much time with God's Word as with the newspaper or TV? I shall, if I really hunger and thirst for God. Do seek God and ask him for this righteousness. Spend time with him when at your best, and your mind is clear. **Ask, and it will be given to you; Seek and you will find; Knock and the door will be opened to you** (Matt. 7:7).

How do we measure up to these questions? How real and genuine is our quest and desire? If seek him with all heart, I shall find him. Or are we playing and giving lip service to these things? Is my desire above everything else to know God, and walk in his will and to be like the Lord Jesus Christ, and be rid of self in every shape and form? Here is the way to blessedness. True happiness. What life is all about.