

MATTHEW 5:6

INTRODUCTION

This beatitude speaks of a strong desire of a driving pursuit, of a passionate force inside the soul. It has to do with ambition that is ambition of the right sort whose object is to honour, obey and glorify God by partaking of his righteousness. This holy ambition is in great contrast to the common ambitions of men, to gratify their own lusts, accomplish their own goals and satisfy their own egos.

But Jesus says that the way to being truly blessed is the way of spiritual hunger and thirst.

1. THE NECESSITY FOR SPIRITUAL HUNGER

Hunger and thirst represent the necessities of physical life. Jesus states that righteousness is required for spiritual life just as food and water are required for physical life. Therefore what Jesus is saying is that righteousness is not an optional spiritual supplement but a spiritual necessity. We can no more live spiritually without righteousness than we can live physically without food and drink.

Sadly famine has plagued our world and from time to time those dreadful pictures of people starving to death is shown on our TV's and our hearts are wretched as we see children with swollen stomachs and as we see men and women lying on the side of the road like matchsticks with no strength to even get up.

But one thing is sure in those nations where there is a famine and that is that a starving person has a single all consuming passion for food and clean water. Nothing else in all the world matters to such people, nothing else is even worth thinking about.

Those who are without God's righteousness are starved of spiritual life but sadly such people do not have the natural desire for spiritual life that they do have for physical life. Sadly they do not even know they are starving and in fact give the impression that they are indeed full and satisfied. The tendency of sinful people is to turn to oneself or to the world for meaning, purpose and fulfilment in life.

But every human being is created with a sense of inner emptiness and need for spiritual reality. Yet without God's intervention in their lives people do not recognise this need or know where to turn in order to have that need met. So they throw themselves into this world and into selfish pursuits and interests in order to fulfil that deep longing for reality. Sometimes they turn to false religions and philosophise in order to look for that filling and satisfaction that only God can give.

Those of us who are Christians here today have had that need met by God but yet the temptation and the attraction of this world is still a big pull for us. This is why we are warning not to love the world or the things of the world because such love is not compatible with those who belong to God and have had their appetites changed by the power of God (1 John 2:15-17).

However the devil is always seeking to use the pull of this world with all its attractions to get us to drift from God and to get us to give our time to things that will not be profitable or helpful to us.

The Christian is someone who has come to know God through His Son Jesus Christ by the work of His Spirit. Therefore the passion for the Christian is not this world but God Himself and therefore a Christian is someone who will hunger and thirsts for the righteousness that pleases God. While we were still in our sins then the desire for sin was all consuming but now that we have come to know God it is the desire for God's glory for his righteousness that should be all consuming.

Now this call to spiritual hunger and thirst also follows on logically in the progression of the beatitudes. The first three are essentially negative commands to forsake evil things that are barriers to the Kingdom. In poverty of spirit we turn away from self-seeking. In mourning we turn away from self-satisfaction and in meekness we turn from self-serving.

However this fourth beatitude is more positive and is a consequence of the other three. When we put aside self and turn to the Lord then we are given a desire for righteousness. In truth the more we turn from our sins even as Christian people and the more we seek after the Lord and the things of the Lord then the more we will desire righteousness that pleases God.

Every Christian will have a true desire for righteous living because we have received the righteousness of Christ and as a result we will want to live righteously like he did. At salvation our sin is removed and placed on Christ and his righteousness is placed on us so that the very way of living life is completely changed. Instead of seeking after sin and seeking to please our sinful nature we will seek after righteous things that will please our righteous God.

In truth the person who has no hunger and thirst for righteousness has no part in God's kingdom, such people are not true Christians. To have God's life within us through the new birth in Jesus Christ is to desire more of his likeness within us by growing in righteousness. The true believer desires to obey God, even though he struggles with his sinful nature.

This battle wages constantly and as a result the Christian must daily root out of his life all known sin and seek daily to submit to the way of Christ and to the righteous life that Christ desires from all his people. Of course no one can do this in their own strength we need God's grace through the work of the Holy Spirit to enable us to deal with sin and to empower us to walk in the path of righteousness.

2. THE MEANING AND OBJECT OF SPIRITUAL HUNGER

None of us have ever faced life threatening hunger and thirst. We think of hunger of having to miss a meal or two and of thirst as having to wait an hour or so on a hot day before we can get a drink. But the hunger and thirst of which Jesus speaks of here is of a more intense sort. The words that are used refer to intense hunger and thirst and the present continuous tense means that this desire is continual it is a deep longing desire for holiness of life and for living that righteous life that God desires. Paul puts this hunger and thirst like this in Philippians 3:10

"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death."

It is a desire to know Christ better day by day, it is a deep longing and desperation to know Christ's power at work within us revealing to us his way and his path of right living. It is a desire to go anywhere and do anything and suffer whatever is necessary in order that we might become increasingly more like Him.

This hunger is really a starvation, this thirst is a matter of life and death all that matters to such people is pleasing Christ and doing what he commands and living like him in every situation. It is a longing to grow in grace to be more like Christ every day. No believer ceases to grow in grace until he reaches his heavenly home, therefore there should never be a time when we are not hungry and thirsty for holiness of life and for right living. We constantly need to see Christ's righteousness manifest in us as we walk humbly before our Lord.

But unbelievers who hunger and thirst for righteousness do not hunger and thirst for holiness that is right living initially but for the righteousness of salvation. That hunger and thirst leads to the

sinner receiving Christ's righteousness so that his sins are forgiven and he is declared to be holy before God because he has received the righteousness of Christ.

Such a hunger means that the seeking sinner is spiritually destitute before God and is mournful because of his sins and in meekness submits himself to God and longs for God's righteousness in Christ to replace his sin.

Jesus says in this beatitude that when a person abandons all hope of saving himself and begins to hunger for the salvation that only God grants to sinners by grace, a salvation that brings Christ's righteousness to us then Jesus says such a person will be blessed. That is that person will enjoy an inner happiness and contentedness that is not dependant upon outward circumstances or personal well being. People's main barrier today to receiving Christ's righteousness is their own self-righteousness, their confidence in their own lives and their own good works. They therefore cannot perceive that they are sinners, who are condemned by God but they believe that their own righteousness will grant them entrance into God's heaven.

Therefore they will never hunger and thirst for Christ's righteousness unless their eyes are opened to the failure of their own righteousness and to their own sinfulness which ultimately condemns them before a holy and righteous God.

Therefore we should pray to this end for sinners to receive Christ's righteousness. They cannot receive it themselves they cannot even desire it themselves only God by his grace can give them a desire, a hunger and thirst for God and for the things of God. So let's pray to this end. But also we should pray for ourselves that our hunger and thirst to know more of Christ and to live righteous and holy lives as a consequence would be undiminished.

That Christ will increase our desire for Himself, that he will help us by his grace not to become distracted by this world but that we will have an unquenched thirst and an unsatisfied hunger for God and for his righteousness for then we will be truly blessed in our lives and in our church.

3. THE RESULT OF SPIRITUAL HUNGER

The result of hungering and thirsting for righteousness is that they will be filled. The word translated filled in the Greek was frequently used of the feeding of animals until they wanted no more. They were allowed to eat until they were completely full or satisfied. Jesus pronouncement is that people who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be completely satisfied.

The filling is God's work as the Greek makes clear "they will be filled" is what God does to hungry and thirsty people. Our part is to seek after God, to hunger and thirst for his righteousness and even then we are unable to do that unless God helps us by his grace.

Once again there is a wonderful paradox here because although we are told that we are to continually seek after God's righteousness, always wanting to grow more like Christ and never ever being content with our Christian walk or godliness. Yet in our pursuit of God's righteousness we shall be satisfied in our pursuit. For example we might eat our favourite food until we are full but that filling does not quench our appetite for our favourite meal in the future. Now I know that is a bad illustration but it is that sort of thing that Jesus is saying here, The Christian is always looking and desiring to grow more and more in the grace of God. We know that we will never arrive until heaven but we long for more of God's grace to obey and walk in harmony with God by his Spirit.

Yet as we are doing so we know this satisfaction that God brings into our lives, the satisfaction that brings a deep joy and contentedness. It is this satisfaction that actually increases our appetite

for more because we know that knowing and seeking God and his righteousness brings that satisfaction.

This is what Jesus said in Matthew 6:33, the seeking after the right things leads to God giving us all that we need, it leads to satisfaction.

But this leads me to a question as I try to bring this to a conclusion. The question is this; what are the genuine marks of hunger and thirst for God's righteousness? I know that my heart is so deceitful that I find it difficult to trust it in this area. I think the answer to that is that first of all there must be dissatisfaction with self. The person who is pleased with his own righteousness will see no need for God's righteousness. The one who knows that self is deceitful and knows that it can never satisfy is the one who also knows that no matter how spiritually mature they may be they still need a deep inner desire for God and for following in the paths of his righteousness.

Secondly I think a genuine hunger and thirst for God will manifest itself in a hunger for God's word. A hungry man does not have to be begged or persuaded to eat. A thirsty man does not have to be forced to drink but he takes every opportunity to do so. So likewise a man or women of God who is hungry and thirsty does not need to be forced or begged or persuaded to feed on God's word.

They will daily read it and devour the word of God. They will attend the opportunities within church life to hear God's word and they will always be encouraging others to do so. Such a person will never have to be rebuked by the Elders for their failure to use the means of grace, they are the ones who are always present at those meetings of the church where the word of God is proclaimed.

I think these two are good tests whether our appetite for God's righteousness is it should be. Do we turn constantly away from every thought of our own righteousness achieving anything spiritual? Do we seek to turn from every sin that promotes self-righteousness? Are we repenting of a self-sufficient attitude?

Finally are we devouring the word of God and seeking under God to use every opportunity to hear his word preached and to apply his word into every situation within our lives?

I trust that we will all know this hunger and thirst and if we are lacking it then let us pray that God may once again give us a real hunger and a real thirst for God and for His righteousness for only God can give us these desires.

Having been given them by God, only God can truly satisfy us therefore let us not settle for anything less than the filling that comes from God as a consequence of our hunger and thirst which he has given to us. Then we will be truly blessed and satisfied.

Amen