

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

Matthew 5:6

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. What do you want? What do you really want? What do you most desire? Your deepest desires affect your happiness. If your greatest desire is for the right thing, then you will be happy; but if your greatest desire is for the wrong thing, you will be happy. In other words, your happiness is dependent upon what you are chasing; what you are running after; what you are pursuing.
2. So, what is the right thing to desire? What is the right thing to pursue?

II. TEXT

1. **Matthew 5:6** Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
2. This verse is part of Jesus' greatest sermon – the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:7). Jesus begins the sermon by explaining the secret to happiness. The secret to happiness is not what you might think – the Ps – pleasure, possessions, power, position, praise. Instead, happiness is found by those who cultivate certain character qualities called beatitudes. Jesus' begins His sermon with eight qualities that lead to happiness. We call them beatitudes because each one begins with the word “blessed,” and the Latin word for “blessed” is beatus, which means “blessed” or “happy.” Let's do a little review.
3. The first beatitude is to be poor in spirit (Mt 5:3). To be poor in spirit is to acknowledge your spiritual poverty. You admit three things: You are a sinner, you deserve hell, and you cannot save yourself. Until you get to that point you cannot be saved, because you don't think you need a savior.
4. The second beatitude is to mourn (Mt 5:4). Jesus is talking about the need to be deeply sorrow for your sins. This attitude toward sin is necessary for repentance, and repentance, and repentance is necessary for salvation.
5. The third beatitude is to be gentle (Mt 5:5). Gentleness has to do with the way you react when people hurt you. It is the Spirit-empowered

ability to react to anger in a Christlike manner. Gentleness is essential for being a person of influence; for making a positive difference in other people's lives.

6. Now let's move to the fourth beatitude. Remember that every beatitude follows the same pattern. There's a promise, a condition, and an explanation. In other words, (1) you will be happy, (2) if you do this, (3) for this reason. In the fourth beatitude Jesus says that (1) you will be happy, (2) if you hunger and thirst for righteousness, (3) because you will be filled. What does that mean?

III. FOUR QUESTIONS FOR THE FOURTH BEATITUDE

1. What does it mean to hunger and thirst?

- i. In the beatitudes Jesus has been using some of the strongest words in the Greek language. The word "poor" in the first beatitude refers to abject poverty. You are so poor that you have to beg. The word for "mourn" in the second beatitude is the most severe type of mourning; it's the way you mourn when a close loved one dies. Similarly, here in the fourth beatitude Jesus uses very strong words for "hunger" and "thirst." The Greek word for "hunger" describes a man who is starving, and the Greek word for "thirst" is the man who is dying of thirst. This the person who will soon die if they don't get food and water.
- ii. In other words, with these words for "hunger" and "thirst" Jesus is referring to the strongest possible desire.
- iii. Again, Jesus is connecting your happiness with your strongest desire. Your happiness in life is determined by your strongest desire; by what you are chasing, pursuing, running after; by what your mind is set on that you must have.
- iv. And Jesus says that if you want to be happy, then your strongest desire must be for righteousness.

2. What is righteousness?

- i. The Bible speaks of righteousness in two ways: Positional righteousness, and personal righteousness.

1. Positional righteousness.

- a. Right status with God. Right standing with God.
Right relationship with God.

- b. All people have sinned, and therefore apart from Christ you don't have right status with God. You are God's enemy, and you must pay for your sins.
- c. But God loves you, and sent Jesus to pay for your sins by dying on the cross and rising again.
- d. Now, if you will put your faith in Jesus Christ, God will justify you – declare you legally righteous in His sight (see Rm 5:1).
- e. Justification has both a present and future application. Presently it means that you have right standing with God; instead of being God's enemy, you are now His beloved child. He is for you and not against you. In the future tense, it means that on judgment day you will not be condemned to hell but will receive eternal life in heaven.
- f. This positional righteousness is by grace through faith (Eph 2:8). You don't deserve and can't earn it. All you can do is trust in what Christ has done for you.
- g. Most scholars are increasingly concluding that this beatitude is not talking about positional righteousness, but personal righteousness.

2. Personal righteousness.

- a. Right conduct before God.
- b. **D.A. Carson** "A pattern of life in conformity to God's will."
- c. **Jerry Bridges** "Obedience to the moral commands of the Bible."
- d. What does the Bible say about personal righteousness?

ii. Eleven Insights About Personal Righteousness

1. It is commanded.

- a. The Bible commands you to be righteous.
 - i. **Psalm 2:20** So follow the way of the good, and keep to the paths of the righteous.

- ii. **Matthew 6:33** But seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you.
- b. God is righteous, and you are commanded to imitate God (Eph 5:1).
 - i. **Deuteronomy 32:4** The Rock—his work is perfect; all his ways are just. A faithful God, without bias, he is righteous and true.
 - ii. In the NT Jesus is often called “the righteous one,” (e.g., 1 Jn 2:1).

2. It does not merit salvation.

- a. **Titus 3:5** he saved us—not by works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy
- b. The word “salvation” here refers to your positional righteous – your right status and right standing with God. Your works of righteousness will not save you from the penalty of sin. You cannot earn salvation. No matter how hard you work, you will never deserve salvation. The only way to be saved is to trust in (believe in, have faith in) Jesus Christ. To believe in Jesus Christ is to stop trusting in your own righteousness.
- c. This means that the motive for pursuing righteousness is not to earn salvation, but gratitude for salvation. You pursue righteousness not to win God’s favor, but because He has freely given you His favor through the cross of Christ.

3. It is evidence of salvation.

- a. **1 John 2:29** Everyone who does what is right has been born of him.
- b. Righteousness does not merit salvation, but it is evidence of salvation. If you have been truly saved (born again), then you will pursue righteousness.
- c. Of course, this doesn’t mean that you will never sin. It means direction, not perfection. If you are truly

saved, then the direction of your life will be gradual progress in righteousness. You won't be sinless, but you will sin less and feel worse.

4. It is the purpose of salvation.

- a. **1 Peter 2:24** He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree; so that, having died to sins, we might live for righteousness.
- b. Understand how important righteousness is. The purpose of salvation is not merely to keep you out of hell in the next life, but so that you will live for God in this life. And the most basic way to live for God is by pursuing righteousness.
- c. You could say that this is one of the purposes of your life. Why are you here? What should you do with your life? Pursue righteousness.

5. It is made possible through salvation.

- a. **Romans 6:16** and having been set free from sin, you became enslaved to righteousness.
- b. Growing in righteousness is only possible for Christians – for those who have experienced salvation. Before salvation, you were enslaved to sin. You couldn't not sin. Non-Christians may be able to overcome certain vices, but not all of them, and not for the right reason.
- c. But what happens when you get saved? God doesn't merely save you from the punishment for sin, but also from the power of sin. He regenerates you (you are born again), giving you a new heart with the desire and power to please Him. He also gives you the indwelling Holy Spirit to empower you. You become "enslaved to righteousness," so that you can't help but desire righteousness. You can't help but feel inclined, and pulled, and drawn, and attracted to righteousness like metal to a magnet.

- d. This is why you can never take pride in your righteousness. Any righteousness that you achieve will still not make you good enough to merit heaven, and any true righteousness that you achieve is only possible because of the work of God in your life.

6. It must surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees.

- a. **Matthew 5:20** For I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven.
- b. This verse comes in the same sermon as the beatitudes – the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7). What does Jesus mean that your righteousness must surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees? These were the religious elites of the first century, and Jesus reserved His harshest criticisms for them. There are four marks of surpassing righteousness:
 - i. It is by faith. The Pharisees rejected Christ and the message of the gospel; they held on to the idea that you could earn your way to heaven (right status and standing with God) through works of righteousness. But that’s not how you get right with God and go to heaven. You must stop trusting in self and put all your faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. When you do that, God justifies you, declaring you righteous.
 - ii. It is unpretentious. The Pharisees often did acts of righteousness to be seen and admired by others. Their motive was to impress people. Surpassing righteousness seeks to please God alone (Mt 6:1). Jesus even said that if you want to be sure that your motives are pure, then do your acts of righteousness – charitable contributions, prayer, fasting, etc. – in secret (Mt 6:1-18).

- iii. It is unconscious. The Pharisees believed they were righteous. They were impressed with themselves (Lk 18:9-14). They thought they were better than everyone else. The truly righteous are unconsciously righteous – no matter how much progress they make, they continue to believe they are they worst, most undeserving sinners. I’m reminded of Paul who called himself the least of the apostles, not worthy to be called an apostle, the least of the saints, and the worst of sinners. Yet he had probably made more progress in righteousness than most Christians.
- iv. It is comprehensive. That is, it is internal and external. Jesus criticized the Pharisees because they concerned with outward righteousness while ignoring internal righteousness. They were concerned with being righteous when they were in public, and with their outward actions, but they didn’t care about being righteous in private, and in their thoughts. The truly righteous pursue righteousness in every arena of their life (Rm 6:13).

7. It is empowered by prayer.

- a. Now we are getting into what the Bible says about how to grow in righteousness.
- b. When Jesus said that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness “will be filled,” it is in the passive voice. That means that you cannot make yourself righteous. So how do you cultivate it?
- c. **Philippians 1:11** filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.
- d. In this verse Paul is praying for the church in Philippi, asking God to grow them in righteousness. This has

two implications. One, you cannot grow in righteousness in your own strength – you need the Holy Spirit to help you. Two, the way to access God’s power for righteousness is through prayer. If you want to grow in righteousness, cry out to God for it. This is one prayer that you can be sure He will answer.

8. It is cultivated through the word.

- a. **2 Timothy 3:16-17** 16 All Scripture is inspired by God, and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.
- b. The Bible is profitable for training in righteousness. If you want to grow in righteousness, you need to read and study and memorize and meditate on Scripture. Read it in your quiet time; study it at church; discuss it in Home Group.
- c. **Jerry Bridges** “There will be no growth in experiential righteousness apart from a regular intake of the Word of God.”

9. It is encouraged by fellowship.

- a. **2 Timothy 2:22** Flee from youthful passions, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.
- b. Notice that Paul says to pursue righteousness, but not alone. He says to pursue it with others who are pursuing the same thing.
- c. Why? You will be greatly affected by your companions. Whoever you spend the most time with will rub off on you. And have you ever noticed that sickness is contagious and health is not? If you hang around unrighteous people, they are more likely to pull you down than you are to pull them up.

- d. Righteousness is a group project. You can't grow by yourself. If you want to grow in righteousness, get involved in church and develop deep friendships with other believers who are chasing righteousness. You will benefit from their encouragement, example, teaching, accountability, and correction.

10. It is brought about by suffering.

- a. **Hebrews 12:11** No discipline seems enjoyable at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.
- b. To grow in righteousness you need prayer, you need the word, you need fellowship, and you also need suffering. This verse is talking about God's loving discipline in our lives. God will intentionally subject you to painful experiences for the purpose of growing you in righteousness. No pain no gain. There are some lessons that can only be learned through suffering. There are some sins that can only be overcome through adversity. There are some attitudes that can only be changed through hardship. Pain is the best preacher; suffering is the best sermon.
- c. This should bring you comfort. This means that there is purpose in your pain. God loves you, and He is all-powerful. He only does what is best for you, and if He wanted to He could insulate you from all suffering. Know this. Anytime God allows you to suffer, there are always good reasons for it, and one of those reasons is always your growth in righteousness.
- d. The Bible says that you should give thanks in everything and rejoice in the Lord always (1 Thess 5:18; Phil 4:4). How can you give thanks in your trials, and rejoice in your time of suffering? Because you know that God has a purpose in your pain, and that

He is going to use this suffering to make you more righteous.

- e. This is also a reminder that God is more concerned with your character than your comfort. God knows that the true secret to happiness is righteousness, not comfort and pleasure. Therefore He is willing to sacrifice your comfort and pleasure and security for your sanctification.

11. It must be your priority and passion.

- a. I want you to notice the language that the Bible uses as it teaches what your attitude should be toward holiness. Let's look at three verses.
- b. **Matthew 5:6** Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
- c. **Matthew 6:33** But seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you.
- d. **1 Timothy 6:11** But you, man of God, flee from these things, and pursue righteousness.
- e. Mt 5:6 says that if you want to grow in righteousness, you must hunger for it like you are starving, and thirst for it like you are dying of thirst. It must be more important to you than food.
- f. Second Mt 6:33 says that if you want to grow in righteousness, you must seek it first; it must be your top priority. And the word "seek" (Gk., *zeteo*) means to strive after with earnestness and anxiety.
- g. Third, 1 Tim 6:11 says to pursue righteousness. The word "pursue" (Gk., *dioko*) means to press hard after, to pursue with earnestness and diligence.
- h. Put all this together and it means that growing in righteousness should be your priority and passion. More than that, it means that it must be your priority and passion. You have three enemies that are working against your righteousness – the world, the

flesh, and the devil – and they are so fierce, so tough, so formidable, that you will only make progress if righteousness is both your passion and priority.

3. How does this lead to happiness?

- i. How does hungering and thirsting for righteousness lead to happiness?
- ii. **Matthew 5:6** Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
- iii. You will be filled with righteousness. If you truly hunger and thirst for righteousness, you will do whatever it takes to acquire it, and God will give it to you.
- iv. But once again, how does this lead to happiness?
- v. For one thing, the Bible promises countless benefits for the righteous. Let me just read a few.
- vi. **Psalms 1:6** For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to ruin.
- vii. **Psalms 5:12** For you, LORD, bless the righteous one; you surround him with favor like a shield.
- viii. **Psalms 34:15** The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry for help.
- ix. **Proverbs 3:33** The LORD's curse is on the household of the wicked, but he blesses the home of the righteous.
- x. **Proverbs 15:6** The house of the righteous has great wealth, but trouble accompanies the income of the wicked.
- xi. **Proverbs 16:1** Gray hair is a glorious crown; it is found in the ways of righteousness.
- xii. **Matthew 6:33 (NLT)** Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.

4. How do you cultivate an appetite for righteousness?

- i. **Matthew 5:6** Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
- ii. In this beatitude Jesus promises that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be happy. But what can you do if don't hunger and thirst for it? What if you desire it, but your desire is weak? Is there anything you can do to increase your desire for

righteousness? I believe there are at least three steps you can take to cultivate your appetite for righteousness.

- iii. First, practice righteousness. The more you practice righteousness, the more you will desire it. It's like a delicious potato chip. Have you ever tried to eat just one? It's hard. Once you eat one, you want more and more. Even if your desire is weak, practice righteousness, and the feelings will follow.
- iv. Second, repent of sin. The reason for your weak desire may be that you have a strong desire for sin. So you need to repent. At first, you will still crave sin. But the more time and distance you put between you and your sin, your desire for sin will diminish, and your desire for righteousness will increase. In other words, feed your desire for righteousness by practicing it, and starve your desire for sin by repentance.
- v. Third, avoid temptation. Avoid people, places, podcasts, videos, music, or anything that would tempt you with sin. In other words, avoid the things that might stimulate your desire for sin (see 1 Tim 2:22, NLT).

IV. CONCLUSION

1. Let me close with some steps of application.
2. Let me begin with the saved – those who know they are saved.
 - i. First, what command do you need to start obeying?
 - ii. Second, what sin do you need to give up?
3. Now let me address those of you who aren't sure if you are saved. The Bible teaches that no one is righteous (Eccl 7:20; Rm 3:10). As the Judge of the universe, God must punish sin; it would not be righteous to let the guilty go free (Pr 17:15). Let me be clear about your condition – the human condition. You are a sinner, you deserve hell, and you cannot save yourself. But God loves you so much that He sent His Son Jesus to pay for your sins by dying on the cross and rising again. And the Bible says that if you will believe in Jesus and give Him control of your life, God will forgive you and give you eternal life and the indwelling Holy Spirit to empower you.