

## **Hunger and thirst for righteousness**

Matthew 5:1-6

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<sup>1</sup> *Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.*

<sup>2</sup> *And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:* <sup>3</sup> *“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 satisfied.”*

You don't need to think long and hard to describe what unrighteousness is.

From an abstract sense, unrighteousness is everything that is wrong or offensive to others. You could say forms of unrighteousness include murder, adultery, lying, cheating, greed, jealousy so on and so forth.

An example of unrighteousness would be the life of Manasseh, the king of Israel in the Old Testament times. His father Hezekiah was a righteous and a good man. But Manasseh his son became so unrighteous that he burned his son as an offering (2 Kings 21:6) and killed many innocent people (2 Kings 21:16). And this unrighteousness is seen by the external actions of people, directed at others, towards other human beings. But the unrighteousness Jesus describes is at a much deeper level. If you read the whole Sermon on the Mount, Jesus isn't just addressing the external unrighteous actions of man. Jesus addresses what is below the surface. Jesus addresses what is deep in the heart of man.

For example, Jesus teaches this way in a few verses down in Matthew chapter five.

*“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ <sup>22</sup> But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment”* Matthew 5:21-22.

We know that murder is wrong but Jesus teaches that murder that is motivated by anger is unrighteousness. And that anger is unrighteousness too.

Similarly, being unfaithful to your spouse is wrong but what causes unfaithfulness or adultery? It is the lust of the eyes. That is unrighteousness. Lust can lead to adultery. And adultery can lead to divorce.

James, the brother of our Lord, in his epistle says what we say can produce so much unrighteousness.

*“..the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a*

*small fire!* <sup>6</sup> *And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness.* James 3:5-6. In some cultures, people take a vow of silence for a few days. Not a bad practice for some people.

And there is an unrighteousness that is not just directed towards other people. Paul says that unrighteousness is suppression of the truth of God. Hear what Paul says in Romans chapter one.

*“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. <sup>19</sup> For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. <sup>20</sup> For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. <sup>21</sup> For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup> Claiming to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup> and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.* Romans 1:18-23

Paul writes to the Corinthians that true love does not rejoice in unrighteousness.

*“it (love) does not rejoice at wrongdoing (unrighteousness), but rejoices with the truth”* 1 Corinthians 13:6. In our day and age, we all kinds of sinful activity being masked in the name of love. That is not love. That is unrighteousness. All unrighteousness is sin (1 John 5:17).

And there is one only outcome for unrighteousness. Condemnation.

Paul writes to the Thessalonians these words. *“..all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness”* 2 Thessalonians 2:12

But what does God say to those who are righteous?

*“Tell the righteous that it shall be well with them”* Isaiah 3:10

*How could we define righteousness?*

Righteousness is simply what is right in the eyes of God. According to God. According to the word of God.

Abel, the brother of Cain, did the right thing in giving his best to God. And God commended him as righteous. (Hebrews 11:4). Noah was called an heir of righteousness. (Hebrews 11:7).

And in this beatitude, our Lord Jesus Christ teaches that happy are those who hunger and thirst for *righteousness*, for they shall be satisfied.

*Have you ever been hungry to the point of starvation?*

Many of the problems we have in our country are not due to scarcity but due to abundance. Due to preferences with almost everything. There are still some hungry people in this country but imagine at least four hundred million people living on three dollars a day for their families. That is more than all the people in the United States. That's how many are hungry in India. It is said that India has made strides in reducing poverty in the last many years but growing up I saw many hungry children. And this hunger is not being hungry but desperately hungry. Anything seems like a gift when you are that hungry.

I saw a few summers in India when it was very very hot. It was so hot that they there would be an advisory to not go out in the sun midday. And there would be reports of people dying of heat stroke. I remember going out on a hot day. And there were tents on side of the roads serving as relief camps. These tents would also be serving water or buttermilk to help withstand the heat. It would be so hot that just walking to the tent made you so dry and thirsty and one cup of water would not be enough. And by the time you finished drinking the water you would be so satisfied.

Jesus says his followers are hungry for doing right.

This is what characterizes a disciple of Jesus Christ. A hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones helps us understand this teaching. He says, *"the whole world is seeking for happiness. There is no question about that...But the great tragedy of the world is that, though it gives itself to seek for happiness, it never seems to find it. What is the matter? We put happiness and blessedness as the one thing we desire, and thus we always miss it. We are not to hunger and thirst after blessedness or happiness. According to the Scriptures happiness is never something that should be sought directly; it is always something that results from seeking something else"*.

This hunger and thirst for righteousness is what gives them happiness. Not being hungry for happiness itself but for righteousness.

And *how* are we to thirst for this righteousness our Lord Jesus Christ talks about?

We are to thirst righteousness in such a way as if we have *no* righteousness to begin with. That is why the order of the first three beatitudes is crucial to understanding this beatitude.

1. The first beatitude teaches us that if we are to be happy in God, we must approach God as if we have nothing. Approach God as if you have zero righteousness. That is true poverty of spirit. That beautiful hymn "Rock of Ages Cleft for me" reminds us that we don't have any righteousness to give to God. Verses two and three go this way.

2 Not the labors of my hands  
can fulfill thy law's demands;  
could my zeal no respite know,  
could my tears forever flow,

all for sin could not atone;  
 thou must save, and thou alone.  
 3 Nothing in my hand I bring,  
 simply to the cross I cling;  
 naked, come to thee for dress;  
 helpless, look to thee for grace;  
 foul, I to the fountain fly;  
 wash me, Savior, or I die.

2. The second beatitude teaches us that we must mourn for our sin. The one who grieves for sin is the one who is comforted.
3. And the third beatitude teaches us that those who are meek and lowly are the ones who are happy.

Jesus gives us an illustration of how this principle works. When you see the prayer of the tax collector and Pharisee, what do you see? The Pharisee prays to God as if he is a righteous man. Fasting twice a day. Giving his tithes. (Luke 18). The prophet Isaiah tells us what is true fasting and giving.

*Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with a wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high. <sup>5</sup> Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a reed, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the Lord? <sup>6</sup> “Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? <sup>7</sup> Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? <sup>8</sup> Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Isaiah 58:4-8*

The Pharisee commends himself but the tax collector approached God as if he had no righteousness on his own. His prayer was humble. He mourned for his sin. He was meek and asked God for mercy. And Jesus says he was the one who went home justified.

And if we have no righteousness, then who has?

Jesus is the only Righteous One. Jesus fulfilled all righteousness. When Jesus was about to be baptized, John the Baptist was hesitant and said, “I need to be baptized by you”. But do you know what our Lord said?

*“Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. <sup>14</sup> John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” <sup>15</sup> But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.”* Matthew 3:13-15

How did the Lord Jesus Christ, the Beloved Son of God fulfill *all* righteousness?

By becoming as if he was the most unrighteous man. Jesus was treated as if he was a notorious criminal. They gave him the punishment traitors or enemies of state would be given. They hung him on the cross. And this was exactly our estate before God. We were enemies of the cross. But, Jesus by enduring all the unjust punishment and shame, Jesus was fulfilling the righteousness of God. Sin has to receive a penalty. And Jesus willingly took it. So that everyone who trusts in him receives the righteousness of God.

*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* 2 Corinthians 5:7

*For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.* 1 Peter 3:18

Jesus is the Only Righteous Man but Jesus is also our Righteousness.

*“And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption”* 1 Corinthians 1:30. *“God has united you with Christ Jesus. For our benefit God made him to be wisdom itself. Christ made us right with God”* (NLT)

To be right with the God is the greatest need for humanity.

And those who are in Jesus Christ and seek righteousness are the truly happy ones.

And Jesus is able to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* 1 John 1:9

Jesus teaches that those hunger and thirst for righteousness will be satisfied.

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*

<sup>13</sup> Jesus said to her, *“Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, <sup>14</sup> but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again.* John 4:13-14

<sup>35</sup> Jesus said to them, *“I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.* John 6:35

There are so many blessings for doing right. *Whoever pursues righteousness and kindness will find life, righteousness, and honor.* Proverbs 21:21

----- Discipleship Questions-----

MESSAGE SUMMARY: **Hunger and thirst for righteousness.** Matthew 5:1-6

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. Read Matthew 6:33. Why is seeking God's righteousness our top priority as disciples? How?  
Matthew 5:3-5, 18:4, Luke 18: 10-14

HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.

2. Do you believe that pursuing righteousness cannot be done apart from Jesus Christ? Why or why not? Isaiah 64:5-6, 1 Corinthians 1:30, Acts 10:35
3. What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

1. For personal reflection: What are some ways you can pursue and promote righteousness? Isaiah 58:6-8