

“Kingdom Character: The Beatitudes” (part 5)

Matthew 5:6

In his compelling book, “The American Paradox: Spiritual Hunger in an Age of Plenty,” well-known social psychologist David G. Myers examines why in an era of great material wealth America suffers from such a disturbing array of social problems that reflect a deep spiritual poverty. Examining the research on social ills from the 1960s through the 1990s, Myers concludes in his book that materialism and individualism have cost us as a nation.

David G. Myers - *“Are we better off than we were 40 years ago?” The answer would have to be ‘materially yes, morally no.’ Therein lies the American paradox. We now have, as average Americans, doubled real incomes and double what money buys. We have espresso coffee, the World Wide Web, sport utility vehicles, and caller ID. And we have less happiness, more depression, more fragile relationships, less communal contentment, less vocational security, more crime (even after the recent decline), and more demoralized children.”*

The research reveals that we are a very hungry people, but we are seeking satisfaction in all the wrong places.

Above everything else in life, what is it that you really want most? What we desire in this life determines the direction of our life.

Proverbs 4:23 - **“Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.”**

Matthew 12:34 - **“For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.”**

The human heart is full of desire, and what we desire most is what we actively pursue. Physical hunger is but a pale reflection of a greater hunger in man’s heart, a spiritual hunger, a hunger that can only be satisfied by God Himself.

Augustine - *“Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee.”*

Physical things cannot satisfy spiritual hunger, and temporal things cannot fill an eternal void.

In Jesus’ day, bread was often hard to come by. People worked by the sweat of their brow just to eat. Most of their life was summed up as a search for bread to satisfy their hunger.

John 6:26 - **“Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.”**

Jesus said that we are not to live and labor for the things of this world which perish, but should seek the satisfying bread which He alone can give.

John 6:35, 48 - **“I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst...I am the bread of life.”**

In this fourth beatitude, Jesus deals with the fact that we are hungry people who are characterized by inward desire. Those who belong to Christ and are subjects of His kingdom are hungry for His righteousness, His presence, and His rule over their lives.

How many of us are hungry and thirsty for righteousness?

Martyn Lloyd-Jones - *“This Beatitude follows logically from the previous ones. It is a statement to which all the others lead. It is the logical conclusion to which they come. It is something for which we should all be profoundly thankful and grateful to God. I do not know of a better test that anyone can apply to himself or herself in this whole matter of the Christian profession than a verse like this. If this verse is to you one of the most blessed statements of the whole of Scripture, you can be quite certain you're a Christian. If it is not, you had better examine your foundations again.”*

Those who are poor in spirit mourn over their sin, and those who mourn over their sin are meek and recognize their need for God's righteousness and are hungry and thirsty for it.

God has an answer for the longings of our heart, and this is what Jesus explains in this fourth beatitude.

There are a few truths I want to point out about spiritual hunger:

1. Spiritual hunger is FOUND in the heart of the true disciple

“Hunger” - *to desire something as necessary to life*

“Thirst” - *(figurative) to desire passionately a spiritual good without which one cannot live*

The imagery associated with “hunger” and “thirst” is the strongest in our language to describe the nature of desire. The words are descriptive of an inward craving, not for food or for anything physically, but for God Himself.

Jesus is describing the character of those who truly love God and desire Him above everything else in life.

A.W. Tozer - *“The great people of the Bible and Christian history have had an insatiable hunger for God. He wants to be wanted. Too bad that with many of us He has to wait so very long in vain.”*

- Enoch had a hunger for God, and it showed up in his life through a consistent walk with God.
- Abraham was a man who had a deep hunger for God, and it was reflected in that he was willing to give up his son if God so required it.
- Mary of Bethany had a hunger for God, and it is seen in her life as each time we meet her in Scripture she is found somewhere near the feet of Jesus.

To hunger and thirst for God is to seek Him with your whole heart, meaning that He is the number one passion of your life, and that nothing is more important to you than knowing Him.

Scripture repeatedly emphasizes the importance of this truth, especially in many of the Psalms:

Psalm 27:4 - **“One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple.”**

Psalm 42:1-2 - **“As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?”**

Psalm 63:1-2 - **“O God, You are my God; early will I seek You; my soul thirsts for You; my flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water. So I have looked for You in the sanctuary, to see Your power and Your glory.”**

David is recognizing that before him there is nothing but barren and dry land that can bring him no satisfaction. His hunger and thirst is not for the things of this world, but for God Himself.

Psalm 23:5 - **“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over.”**

God has a table prepared for His own where we will find every sort of delicacy and delight that we could ever possibly desire.

There is something supernatural within the heart of the follower of Jesus that longs for Him. Having been to the fountain of living water, they are no longer satisfied with the mudholes that the world offers.

2. Spiritual hunger is FOCUSED on righteousness that comes from God

Notice that Jesus specifically mentions the object of the disciple's hunger and thirst--righteousness.

Jesus is not referring to self-righteousness. In fact, He is not referring to that which can be produced by man.

Isaiah 64:6 - "But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags."

Righteousness is descriptive of the character of God.

Jesus is referring to a deep spiritual hunger and thirst for the righteousness which only comes from God as God is faithful to forgive sin and declare those who trust in Christ as righteous. Thus, they are longing for Christ's character to be made manifest in their own heart and life.

What if we were to really thirst for God like we thirst for lesser things?

- Do we want Him like a starving man wants food?
- Do we want Him like a man thirsting to death wants water?

James M. Boice tells about how during World War I, British forces under the command of General Allenby liberated Palestine from the Turkish control. Major Vivian Gilbert was one of the officers in the British army who went on to write a book about his experiences entitled, "The Last Crusade."

Major V. Gilbert - *"Driving up from Beersheba, a combined force of British Australians and New Zealanders were pressing on the rear of the Turkish retreat over arid desert. The attack outdistanced its water carrying camel train. The water bottles were empty, the sun blazed pitilessly out of a sky where the vultures wheeled about expectantly. Our heads ached, our eyes became bloodshot and dim in the blinding glare. Our tongues began to swell. Our lips turned to a purplish black and begin to burst. Those who dropped out of the column were never seen again, but the desperate force struggled on to Sheria. There were wells at Sheria and had they been unable to take the place by nightfall, thousands were doomed to die of thirst. And so we fought that day as men fought for their lives. We entered Sheria's station on the heels of the retreating Turks. The first objects which met our view were the great stone cisterns full of cold, clear, drinking water. And in the still night air, the sound of water running into the tanks could be distinctly heard maddening in its nearness. Yet not a man murmured when orders were given for the battalions to fall in two deep facing the cisterns."*

It took four hours before the last man had his drink of water. And in all that time, they had been standing 20 feet from a low stone wall on the other side of which were thousands of gallons of water.

Major V. Gilbert - *"I believe that we all learned our first real Bible lesson on the march from Beersheba to Sheria wells. If such were our thirst for God and for righteousness, for His will in our life, a consuming, all embracing, preoccupying desire, how rich in the fruit of the Spirit would we be."*

This beatitude is repulsive to the world. It is even repulsive to some who say they are believers. The reason is that it rules out self-satisfied and half-hearted religion. It is an open rebuke to the lukewarm type of Christianity that so many seem content with.

I am amazed at how many there seem to be in today's church who are lukewarm and spend their life seeking satisfaction from places where it cannot be found. They constantly seek the thrill of some new trinket, some new experience, or some new idea.

We were never made to hunger for happiness; we were made to hunger for righteousness. And yet so many try to satisfy their spiritual hunger with things that cannot every satisfy it.

Isaiah 55:1-3 - **"Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend money for what it not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance. Incline your ear, and come to Me."**

The picture being painted is taken from the Middle East in days where water was precious because there is a shortage of it. It is as if a water salesman were in the marketplace selling water to those who need it. The Lord is picture as such here.

God says, "Everyone who thirsts, come to Me!"

John 7:37-38 - **"If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."**

Jesus issues the same invitation. Yet, in the Old Testament, listen to how Israel responded:

Jeremiah 2:13 - **"For My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns--broken cisterns that can hold no water."**

God's people had exhausted all their resources on bread that could not satisfy their hunger. In digging wells for themselves that could hold no water, they had forsaken the only One who could quench their thirst.

It describes living with this constant idea that the grass is always greener somewhere else, and so you are always chasing satisfaction. Yet somehow, it seems to elude your grasp.

You weren't made to hunger and thirst for lesser things; you were made for God. You were created for the purpose of reflecting His righteous image.

When the church becomes spiritually satisfied, it is time for revival.

A.W. Tozer - *"Current evangelicalism has laid the altar and divided the sacrifice into parts, but now seems satisfied to count the stones and rearrange the pieces with never a care that there is not a sign of fire upon the altar. But God be thanked that there are a few who care. They are those who, while they love the altar and delight in the sacrifice, are yet unable to reconcile themselves to the continued absence of fire. They desire God above all. They are athirst to taste for themselves the piercing sweetness of the love of Christ about Whom all the holy prophets did write and the psalmists did sing."*

Revival breaks out in the church when God's people desire Him above everything else in life.

3. Spiritual hunger is FULFILLED by Christ and nothing else

The first three beatitudes show us our need, and this fourth beatitude shows us God's solution. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are filled with righteousness.

God declares us righteous through faith in Jesus Christ. Those who are declared righteous are those whose sins are forgiven.

This verse is perhaps the most wonderful of all the beatitudes because it offers the solution to our greatest need in that it points us to God's greater remedy in Christ.

Context shows that we should understand the blessing to mean that those who hunger and thirst FOR righteousness will be filled WITH righteousness.

Jesus brings righteousness to my heart and life.

2 Corinthians 5:21 - **"For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."**

There is a blessed dissatisfaction here--those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are filled, but that doesn't mean that they stop hungering and thirsting for it. Instead, they keep coming back for more and more. They grow hungrier and thirstier for God the more that they know Him and the closer they get to Him.

Philippians 3:10 - "That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death."

Paul had come to know Christ, but in knowing Him, he wants to know Him more and more.

D.A. Carson - *"The person who hungers and thirsts for righteousness is blessed by God, and filled; but the righteousness with which he is filled is so wonderful that he hungers and thirsts for more of it."*

Every day with Jesus is sweeter than the day before! Nothing and no one else satisfies.

I read where a psychologist named William Marston, who lived in the early 20th century, once asked 3,000 individuals, "What do you have to live to for?" The answers he got shocked him, to say the least. He found that 94% were not living at all; they were simply enduring the present while waiting for something in the future. They were waiting for something to happen--waiting for children to grow up and leave home, waiting for next year when things would be better, or at least different, waiting for the chance to take a trip, waiting for tomorrow. Waiting, waiting, waiting. Marston concluded that for these individuals, life had deteriorated to a cycle with little meaning in and of itself.

They were hungry and thirsty people, but they were looking for bread and water in all the wrong places.

What do you have to live and look forward to? What are you hungry and thirsty for? Only Jesus satisfies the soul!