

SATISFACTION GUARANTEED
(Matthew 5:6)

The fourth Beatitude Jesus lists in His famous Sermon on the Mount is, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” We all understand what it means to hunger and thirst as each day we regularly experience these signals from our bodies demanding to be filled with their necessary fuel of food and drink, but what does Jesus mean in saying we are to experience this for righteousness as well? In using the very natural, thus common human experience of hungering and thirsting, Jesus is giving us a tangible picture of not only what the depth of our desire for righteousness should be, but also its consistency. Hunger and thirst are strong desires that demand to be satisfied. As believers and followers of Christ we are to have, as He did, a strong desire to be righteous for without it we will find ourselves consistently unsatisfied just as we would be without regular meals of food and drink. Thus, like hunger and thirst, this desire cannot be satisfied with hit and miss acts or episodes of righteousness, but a constant daily pursuit and practice of it. This then brings us to what it means to be righteous. The Greek word used here means “the state of how a person ought to be.” The vagueness of the definition presents the problem of who decides how a person ought to be. Do governments decide? Do religions or philosophies decide? Does society decide or does each of us decide for our self? To answer this, let me ask you a question: who decides how a product ought to be; ought to function; ought to look? Obviously the creator of it does. So who decides how we ought to be? Obviously, our Creator does! Therefore, righteousness must be the state of being how God says we ought to be. Yet, therein lies the problem because too often what we hunger for, what we thirst after, what our hearts desire, tends to run contrary to God’s standards for how we ought to be.

In using the metaphor of hunger and thirst, Jesus is emphasizing the tremendous power our desires can have over us: how they can captivate our thoughts, how they motivate and energize our actions, and even define us. Although we have become spiritually alive through faith in Christ, we are confronted daily by a culture that is enamored with the physical realm, one in which we too can easily become captivated by its toys, treasures, and sensual pleasures. In this age of technology, this world, and even our homes, have become saturated with countless ways and means by which we are told we can satisfy our every need. Daily we are bombarded with images of people’s lives seemingly filled and satisfied by such things as fame, fortune, possessions, power, sex, and pleasure. Promising us blessings such as happiness, fulfillment, success, abundant life, and validation, Satan’s counterfeits have only proven successful in distracting us from the true blessings promised by God. Yet, as with all counterfeits, we soon come to realize that we have been fooled, as not only do we lack contentment and happiness, but also the validation we so desperately need and crave. Though the selling point of these counterfeits is their promise of lasting fulfillment and purposeful lives, the emptiness and difficult consequences of our experiences with them prove otherwise. Rather than delivering the fulfillment and satisfaction they promised, we are filled with a sense of emptiness and regret instead. Yet our Creator made us to be in a covenant relationship with Him whereby He would lovingly provide for all our needs. In this intimate relationship with Him we would find all we desired, all we needed; He would be our

sufficiency. In Him we are to find our joy, our contentment, our purpose, our validation, our very life. Sadly, however, when it comes to looking to God to be our all in all, we are too often guilty of being like the N.T. characters Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman who both looked elsewhere to satisfy their needs until they met Jesus (Jn.3-4).

Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a member of the Sanhedrin, which means that when it comes to be considered a righteous man according to the requirements of Judaism, he was one of the top in the nation of Israel at that time. On the other hand, the Samaritan woman, based on the standards of the day, was not only considered an outcast to the Jews because of her race, but an outcast among her own people because she was an immoral woman by having had five husbands and not being married to the man she was living with at the time. Even though they appear to be extreme opposites, in His conversations with them Jesus talks to both of them about their need for salvation. Like us, these two individuals had been trying to find fulfillment through something or someone other than God. They too were guilty of falling for two of Satan's most successful counterfeits. Nicodemus tried by being religious, by outwardly conforming his life to layer upon layer of man-made rules and regulations that caused the Jews to not only lose sight of God's Word, but ultimately of God Himself (Jn.7:28). Outwardly conforming our behaviors to rules and regulations can never make us righteous in God's eyes as He looks at the heart (I Sam. 16:7), therefore all Nicodemus' efforts at becoming righteous were for naught. No wonder he felt incomplete, that something was missing; or why else did He seek Jesus for answers. Conforming oneself to a religion, a philosophy, or a group for whatever reason can never fulfill or satisfy us as they fail to deal with what really matters, which is matters of our hearts, of our souls and spirits. Only God knows us intimately enough to address the hurt, need, and emptiness of these areas. He alone can heal our hurts, satisfy our needs, fill our empty places, and validate us. If Nicodemus had found all this by being religious, Jesus' words and actions would never have resonated so deeply within him that he went to see Jesus to get from Him what he was missing. The Samaritan woman went in the opposite direction to find her fulfillment. While Nicodemus looked to conform to a religious standard of righteous living, she chose another all too common path of looking to others, particularly members of the opposite sex, to fulfill her. Six men later, she still hadn't found her soul-mate, the one who would complete her, nor could she have. Since God made our souls to be in relationship with Him, then He alone can be our soul-mate. There is no person on earth who can play this role in our lives as no human is equipped to love us as deeply and as unconditionally as we long for; neither can anyone ever know us as intimately, and since no one is sufficient to satisfy himself, how can he do so for anyone else? Looking to others to satisfy us is like one broken vessel taking from another broken vessel the pieces it needs to make it whole: it simply doesn't work. God alone knows exactly how and why we are broken and therefore what is needed to fix us; He knows the truth that will set us free so that we might experience the wholeness and fullness we were created for and that will enable us to live righteously (Jn.8:32; I Thess.5:23-24).

So how do we live righteously? How do we go from hungering and thirsting after the desires of our hearts and begin hungering and thirsting after the righteousness God desires for us? At the moment of our salvation God begins the process known as *sanctification*. Throughout the rest of our lives He will use various means, such as our circumstances, relationships, blessings, trials, and especially His Word, to make us into

the image of Jesus. The reason He wants us to be like Jesus is because He is the only one ever to have lived a thoroughly righteous life. God calls us to be righteous and the only example we have to follow is Jesus, so to hunger and thirst for righteousness is to strongly desire to be like Jesus. He is the example of how we ought to be because that is how God created us to be (Rom.5:17-19). Our first step in this process is putting our faith in Jesus Christ. Just as Abraham was declared righteous by God because of his faith in Him, so too are we declared righteous by God for believing who Jesus is and all that He has accomplished for us through His life, death, and resurrection (Gal.3:6,11; Phil.3:9). This places us in a covenant relationship with God through Christ. As this relationship grows we will come to know God more intimately and thereby fall deeper and deeper in love with Him. Consequently, our desire to live in a manner pleasing to Him rather than ourselves will naturally increase as we obey whom we love and whom we believe. Thus the evidence for our having true faith and love is our obedience to God: our choosing to live righteously as He desires. This in turn fulfills what James said, that true saving faith must have works or it is dead. We are not saved by our good works or righteous deeds, but rather they bear testimony that we are saved as the *doing* of righteousness is born out of the influence of *being* in an intimate relationship with a righteous God (Eph.4:21-24; James 3:17-26). So how can we know the difference between true righteousness and the insidious counterfeit of self-righteousness that Satan tries to masquerade as righteousness?

The core difference between them is the motivation of the heart. As we discussed above, the motivation for living a genuinely righteous life is love of God. It is born out a heart of love and gratitude, finding its humble and thankful expression in thoughts and actions designed to love Him back; thus, we willingly sacrifice living our lives to serve and magnify ourselves in order to serve and magnify Him (Mt.16:24). On the other hand, the motive for self-righteousness is love of self. By loving ourselves over God, essentially we become the god of our lives whereby we decide whose standards we will follow to get into heaven. We pick and choose what is right and wrong, godly and ungodly, just and unjust, righteous and unrighteous. Therefore, based on our standards, we recognize we may not be perfect, but for the most part believe we are good enough for God to allow us into heaven. On the surface, however, it can be very difficult to discern the difference between them. Yet there are telltale signs that enable us to get past the veneer of self-righteousness so as to see the real heart of the matter. One glaring telltale sign is that with the self-righteous in one way or another everything becomes about them; all roads of conversation and activities begin and end with them. Everything is filtered through a mindset of how it relates to them or affects them, whereas true righteousness seeks to see everything in terms of how it relates to God and how it affects Him. The self-righteous also have an unteachable spirit. Because their righteousness is a flimsy house of cards they are unable to admit to being wrong or to take full responsibility for anything. They will continue to hold to their interpretation of events even in the face of incontrovertible fact or reason; otherwise, their whole identity would collapse. Should they ever concede to being at fault there is usually a “Yes, but...” to minimize the degree of their fault. However the truly righteous, knowing the foundation of their righteousness is Christ and not self, are humble enough to admit to their wrongdoing, seeking to make it right and to learn from it. Another hallmark of the self-righteous is their critical spirits. They cannot help but compare themselves to others, emphasizing their deficits so as to

continually prop up their images of righteousness. The genuinely righteous, however, compare themselves to Christ only, and realize that they have a long way to go, so they are not worthy to judge others' shortcomings. Moreover, the self-righteous place a lot of emphasis on the letter of the law, but not the spirit of it. They know the law as it is written, and love to remind others of it, but not the spirit of God's heart behind it. Unlike the righteous who see in God's law His heart of love that wants to keep us from destroying ourselves by *not doing* that which He forbids, but also *not even entertaining the idea in our minds*, they see it only in terms of their outward actions, of what they are *not supposed to do* as opposed to becoming who God wants them *to be*. They cling to the letter of the law as a drowning man to a life-preserver, not only because it's easier to obey it on the outside than on the inside, but also because they fear God's wrath more than they trust and rest in His mercy and grace. Self-love, self-justification, and pride are the main pillars of self-righteousness which should not be surprising, as those are the primary sins of its author. Satan is keenly aware of the emphasis God places on righteousness, so he seeks to derail God's efforts to bring forth the fruit of righteousness, of Christ-likeness in His children through the deception of self-righteousness. Satan delights in the effectiveness of his counterfeit as it also serves his purpose of blinding people to their wretched sinfulness, thereby keeping them from coming to faith in Christ as they never see their dire need for a savior.

So why does God place so much emphasis on our being righteous to the point that He wants us to hunger and thirst after it? The primary reason is God's desire to restore us to how He created us to be, so as to have a relationship with us as He intended. Because God created us to be in a relationship with Him, we had to be like Him; therefore He made us in His image and He is completely righteous. Adam and Eve were created righteous, that state of how God wanted them to be, until they ate of the forbidden fruit, thus causing human nature to fall into unrighteousness instead. This destroyed the ability for humans to relate to God as they were no longer like Him. Thankfully, God loves us too much to leave us in this broken state of unrighteousness and its hurtful consequences. Therefore, He has provided ways in which man could seek to attain His standard of righteousness (i.e. the Commandments) so as to relate to Him, and to allow for their inability to live up to it to be covered by the blood of sacrifices. In the O.T. it was the blood of animals and since N.T. times it is the blood of His Son, Jesus Christ. Since the fall of mankind, God has been in the restoration business. He is constantly working to restore in us what was lost in the Garden and all that we continue to lose through our personal unrighteousness as well as that perpetrated against us by others. No wonder Jesus said that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be satisfied as finally our emptiness, our sense of being incomplete is gone, replaced by the wholeness found through faith in Christ and the restoration of our relationship with God. That brings up another reason why God emphasizes righteousness: because He desires that none should perish (Mt.18:14), He wants those who belong to Him to live lives that glorify Him. This means one that correctly reflects who He is, thereby enabling others to see He is truly real by their transformed lives and hopefully want to become saved as well. Thus our living righteously is vital to God's work here on earth and to the eternal destination of those in our sphere of influence; therefore to hunger and thirst for righteousness is a vital characteristic of a believer's life.

It is also a vital component to the three previous Beatitudes of *poor in spirit*, *mourn*, and *meekness* as it completes the framework of salvation that Jesus is outlining with these opening Beatitudes. In my previous devotionals on the other three Beatitudes I always mentioned the cause and effect relationship found in the order of these Beatitudes. Jesus started with *poor in spirit* because it is the primary attitude of humility necessary to open your heart to Christ. To be poor in spirit is to realize that there is absolutely no good thing in you to commend yourself to God, thus the humble recognition of your need of the Savior. Having thus seen the depths of your depravity you would naturally be deeply grieved over how much damage your sin has done, not only to God and others, but even to yourself, causing you to *mourn*. This leads to the realization that a life lived for self is a lost life; thus, your life can no longer be about you, getting all you can, but about God: about loving Him and through Him, loving others. That is the essence of *meekness*, the complete surrender of your life to God, trusting Him for every need and in every circumstance. Consequently you become free from pursuing your selfish appetites for the treasures and pleasures of this world so as to “seek first (i.e. *hunger and thirst for*) the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Mt.6:33). Therefore Jesus uses these first four Beatitudes as a framework at the beginning of His premiere teaching on what it means to be a citizen of God’s kingdom, to clarify what is involved in becoming truly saved through faith in Christ. Apart from recognizing your utter spiritual poverty; apart from mourning deeply over the destructiveness and deadliness of your sins; apart from realizing this life is not about you, that your life is not your own (I Cor.6:20); apart from a longing to live for Him, to become like your Lord and Savior, is there any evidence to verify your salvation? These four Beatitudes are the benchmarks of a life that has gone beyond mere mental ascent to the gospel of Christ to being “crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal.2:20). Some of the scariest verses in the Bible are found toward the end of the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus said that not everyone that calls Him *Lord* will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of His Father in heaven. Sadly, Jesus says there will be those who think they will be in heaven having done many things in His Name, but instead of hearing, “Well done My good and faithful servant” (Mt.25:23), will hear, “Depart from Me, I never knew you who practice lawlessness” (Mt.7:21-23). Therefore righteousness, living according to God’s standards and doing things God’s way, is obviously a prerequisite for being in heaven. Because you are absolutely incapable of being righteous enough to enter heaven in and of yourself, Jesus came and lived a righteous life so that God could impute His righteousness to you when by faith you come to believe in who Jesus is and all that He did for you through His life, death, and resurrection (II Cor.5:21). Therefore, having the righteousness of Christ and being empowered by the indwelling of God’s Spirit, you are now able and accountable to live a life of righteousness: to becoming more and more like your Lord and Savior. Not to do so, as we just learned, is indicative of a far more serious problem with eternal repercussions. Therefore, it is imperative that we make it our greatest desire and goal to glorify God, as then we will enjoy Him, rather than simply making it our goal to enjoy Him in order to glorify Him. No wonder Jesus said that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be *blessed* and *satisfied* because in doing so we will enjoy a vibrant and satisfying relationship with God that is not being compromised by our sin.

Prayer:

Father God,

Thank You for reminding me of the immense importance of how I live my life; of my daily thoughts and choices. Father, forgive me for the times I still choose to go against Your righteous standards to pursue my selfish desires. Lord God, continue to use whatever means necessary to train me, to grow me up into the image of Your precious Son. I do hunger and thirst to be like Him as I want please Him. I ask that You increase this desire that I would be a witness for Him so as not to bear His Name in vain. I know I have a long way to go, but my hope is grounded in Your promise that You began this good work in me and You are faithful to complete it. I yield myself to Your, the Potter's hands, that I might become a vessel for Your honor and glory. I continue to ask for Your eternal perspective on life so that I will not be so tempted to capitulate to my flesh, but rather to be even more determined to persevere on the straight and narrow path no matter what. Lord God, I thank You for making my life full and completely satisfying through the amazing gift of Your Son. Amen.

Follow Up:

Jesus concludes the teaching we just looked at about who will and will not enter the kingdom of heaven with a parable to illustrate His point. In this parable Jesus says he who hears His words and then act on them is like a wise man who built his house upon the rock and when the rain and floods came and the winds pounded that house, it did not collapse for it had been "founded" upon the rock. Yet he who hears His words and doesn't act on them is like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand and when the rain and floods came and the wind pounded it, that house fell and "great was its fall" (Mt.7:24-27)! Jesus' meaning is clear: it is not enough for us to be merely *hearers* of God's Word, but *doers* as well. Those who build their lives on the righteousness of Christ are wise in that they build with the future in mind and are thus able to weather all that life throws at them as their foundation is solid. However, those who build their lives on a standard of righteousness other than Christ are foolish in their short-sightedness and will come to see their house collapse under the weight of the storms of life due to an unstable foundation. Yet that will be nothing compared to the *great fall* they will experience when their expectations of being in heaven are shattered upon hearing Jesus say... *depart from Me* as He doesn't know them and their standard of righteousness was really lawlessness to Him. It is not merely enough to hear the Word of God taught, or even to read it. Unless we integrate its truths into our lives so as to become transformed by them in both thought and deed, any claim to know Christ will not only ring hollow, but also will not stand the test of time or eternity.

Challenge:

The challenge this Beatitude sets before you is to put action to your faith in Christ: to take your knowledge of Christ and move it the longest eighteen inches in the universe down to your heart, to your will to live it out. There are so many Scriptures that warn you not to rest your eternal destination on a onetime confession of faith in Christ, but rather to “test yourself to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you – unless indeed you fail the test” (II Cor.13:5; Phil.2:12)? How do you know if you fail the test? By whether or not your life matches that of Christ and bears the peaceable fruit of righteousness (Heb.12:11). Not only are you called to inspect the spiritual fruit of others, but more importantly, your own as well (Mt.7:7). God’s goal is for your life to be fruitful so He provides you with Himself, His Word, and godly people to bring that about. Also, like any good fruit arborist, He prunes you that you might be even more fruitful (Jn.15:1-11). Has God been trying to prune certain attitudes, character qualities, habits, relationships, or behaviors from your life? Are you working with Him in that? What fruit of righteousness are others seeing in you? Are you experiencing a growing hatred for that which God hates along with a corresponding increase in loving that which God loves? Confessing Christ as your Lord and Savior is a must, but be mindful that it doesn’t begin and end there. It also requires that you are intentional about Who you are building your life on, that it is the genuine foundation of Christ Jesus. (Rom.9:33).

For Further Study:

II Chronicles 16:9; Psalm 50:22-23; John 15:1-11; Romans 12:1-2; 10:9-10; I Corinthians 8:3; 15:58; Ephesians 4:17-5:21; Philippians 3:8-21; Colossians 3:1-17; Hebrews 12:1-13

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