

Beatitudes-Kingdom Desires—Matthew 5:6
College Baptist Church
July 7, 2021

Today we will pick back up with our summer sermon series on the Beatitudes. You can find the Beatitudes in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 5. So, I invite you to turn there with me. If you didn't bring a Bible, there are Bibles in the pew racks. You will find Matthew 5 on p. 809. The sermon text is also printed in the bulletin along with space for taking notes. Today, we will focus on the fourth Beatitude, which is found in verse 6.

As you turn there and since it's been a couple weeks, let me remind you that the Beatitudes are kingdom blessings, pronounced by King Jesus, upon citizens of his kingdom, which is already but not yet. So, these are pronouncements of divine favor and approval from Jesus on his people that have consequences in the present *and* future.

And each Beatitude consists of a pronouncement and a promise. The first half is the pronouncement; and it begins: "*blessed are the/those...*" The second half is the promise; and it starts with the word "*for*", which means "because."

So, the promise explains the pronouncement. The promise answers the question "why" or "how" the pronouncement is a blessing, even though it might not sound like one.

With all of that as reminder, let's listen again to all of the beatitudes in Matthew 5:1-12; before focusing on the fourth Beatitude, which is found in verse 6.

Seeing the crowds, [Jesus] went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. ² And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

³ "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

⁴ "*Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*

⁵ "*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*

⁶ "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*

⁷ "*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.*

⁸ "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*

⁹ "*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*

¹⁰ "*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

The Pronouncement: Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness

You know the date today, right? July 11. Or 7/11. And you know what that means, right? Slurpee Day! That's right, today you can get one free Slurpee at any participating 7-Eleven convenience store. Which brings back great memories for me. Because in college I had a deep desire for Slurpees—*especially* when I needed a study break. So, it was not uncommon for me and a bunch of friends to pile into my white, Oldsmobile Cutlass Supreme and head to 7-Eleven to quench our thirst for a Slurpee.

And we were cheap enough and thirsty enough to get all the Slurpee we could get with our spare change. First, we might have a quick taste of every flavor. Then, the key to get as much Slurpee in your cup as possible is to “tap down” your Slurpee. So, you want to fill...and tap...fill and tap. And finally, you want to make sure the entire dome-shaped lid is full with the incredible, frozen goodness that is a Slurpee!

Then comes the satisfaction. Sipping a Slurpee on a study break is so satisfying—not in a nutritional sense, I’m sure. But you get what I mean. It satisfies taste buds. It quenches the thirst. It fulfills the need for caffeine—especially if you mix Mountain Dew with Cherry or something.

My mouth is watering just thinking about Slurpees. You might say that I desire a Slurpee. In fact, I’m almost tempted to drive to Jackson or Adrian this afternoon to get one. Those who thirst for a Slurpee, will be satisfied.

Well, today’s beatitude is about being thirsty—not for a Slurpee OR a cup of cold water on a hot summer day OR your favorite beverage, but for righteousness. Today’s beatitude is about being hungry—not for a steak OR a handful of Michigan blueberries OR a bowl of ice cream, but for righteousness.

Hunger and thirst are ways to express craving, longing, or desire—and Jesus makes a pronouncement about the desires of his kingdom citizens in verse 6:
“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...” So, Jesus uses the universal desire for food and drink to illustrate the way we ought to think about the desires of his kingdom—particularly a desire for righteousness.

So, what is righteousness? And what does it look like to desire righteousness?

According to one Biblical dictionary, righteousness is “the character or quality of being right or just.” (Vines) This particularly refers to being “right with God”—because God himself is the essence of righteousness. He is perfectly right and morally correct and purely just in every way.

So, to hunger and thirst for righteousness—to *desire* righteousness—is not only to desire righteous things, but to desire God himself—the righteous one. And that is why Jesus says this desire is a blessing—an act of divine favor. Because we don’t naturally seek righteousness on our own. Listen to the Apostle Paul quote Psalm 14 in Romans 3:10-12.
...as it is written:

“None is righteous, no, not one;

¹¹ no one understands;

no one seeks for God.

¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;

no one does good,

not even one.”

So, hungering and thirsting for righteousness is a blessing to be received. Desiring God and his righteousness is an act of divine favor—*not* something we can muster up on our own. In other words, we will only desire righteousness if we have first been declared righteous in God’s sight. I’m talking about being justified by faith.

The Bible teaches that we are justified—that is *declared* righteous, by faith. We sinners—who did not seek God on our own—are *declared* righteous by faith in Jesus—who died on the cross for our sins and rose victorious from the grave.

We heard this described in the Scripture reading this morning from Romans 1—which is actually a quotation of Habakkuk 2. “*The righteous shall live **by faith.***”

We see it elsewhere in Romans, when Paul says in Romans 3:28, “*we hold that one is **justified by faith** apart from works of the law.*” That is to say, our right standing before God is based *not* on what we do, but what Jesus has done.

And we see this in the life of Abraham—the father of faith, who was counted righteous by his faith in the promises of God. Genesis 15:6 says, “[*Abraham*] *believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.*”

I say all this to make it abundantly clear that Jesus is not advocating for “works-righteousness.” He is not urging us to conjure up some desire we don’t naturally have in order to do right deeds in order to win his approval. No! He is saying “blessed” are those who authentically desire righteousness. This is a blessed sign that they have *already* been declared righteous by faith in him alone—the only King who saves.

That being said, I do believe Jesus is calling Christians to desire righteousness. In other words, we should desire to grow into our already-declared righteous status. As Jesus will put it later in the Sermon on the Mount—in chapter 6, we should be seeking after God’s kingdom and his righteousness. So, what does it look like to desire what is right? What does it look like to desire what is just? I’d like to suggest two areas where we can and should cultivate this desire—this appetite—for righteousness.

First, we should hunger and thirst for personal righteousness. Right living matters for the Christian—it is fruit that grows from the root of our justification. And while, according to the prophet Isaiah, our pre-conversion righteous deeds are like filthy menstrual rags, our post-conversion righteousness is pleasing in God’s sight. Bible scholar, D.A. Carson says that Christians ought to be “*wholly doing the will of God from the heart.*” Does that describe you?

Jesus’ adopted earthly father, Joseph, was noted for his righteous lifestyle. In fact, he is sometimes known as “Joseph the Just” because he is described as a “just man” in Matthew 1:19. The word just is the same word as righteous. Joseph was hungering and thirsting for righteousness, are you?

Let's not forget that personal righteousness begins with a desire for God himself. The Puritan pastor-scholar Jonathan Edwards says this about our appetite for righteousness. *Persons need not and ought not to set any bounds to their spiritual...appetites...our hungerings and thirstings after God and Jesus Christ... [Therefore] endeavor to promote spiritual appetites...There is no such thing as excess in our taking of this spiritual food. There is no such virtue as temperance in spiritual feasting.* (Edwards). In other words, we should be gluttons for righteousness. Always hungry for more. Always feasting, never fasting. Hungering and thirsting for more of God.

And when we hunger and thirst for more of God, it will show in our behaviors. We should ask God for deeper hunger for his Word—where we learn of his righteous character. We should pray that God would grant us a deeper thirst for Christian fellowship—so that our righteous desires can be stoked up in the company of fellow believers. We should long for a life of greater righteousness—exemplified by faith that actually obeys the commands of God—even if that means suffering for righteousness' sake as we learned in our study of 1 Peter. Let's remember that righteous obedience is the fruit of authentic faith—it's what the Apostle Paul calls the “obedience of faith.”

Second, we should hunger and thirst for social righteousness. Social justice is often pitted against the Gospel. As if social justice and the Gospel are somehow at odds or mutually exclusive. But I would argue that social righteousness or social justice, rightly understood, should flow out of the Gospel. I fear that much of conservative evangelicalism has grown allergic to social justice because it has been hijacked by so-called progressive Christians—who have all but renounced the Biblical Gospel. But I would humbly suggest that it is high time that Bible-believing, theologically orthodox, evangelicals take back what rightly belongs to us—that is, a deep concern for righteousness and justice, not only in our own personal lives and in our own churches, but in our society at large.

Historian David Bebbington is known for defining the evangelical movement according to 4 criteria, which have become known as the Bebbington Quadrilateral. So, if you are wondering what is meant historically by the term “evangelical” here are Bebbington's four characteristics. Evangelicals are committed to...

- Conversionism: the belief that lives need to be transformed through a “born-again” experience and a life long process of following Jesus
- Biblicism: a high regard for and obedience to the Bible as the ultimate authority
- Crucicentrism: a stress on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as making possible the redemption of humanity
- Activism: the expression and demonstration of the gospel in missionary and social reform effortsⁱ

That fourth characteristic—activism—is what hungering and thirsting for social righteousness looks like. And notice that it begins with expressing the gospel through the proclamation of missionaries, but it also consists of social reform efforts. That's why Christians have founded organizations like...

- The Salvation Army & The YMCA
- Hospitals & Crisis Pregnancy Centers
- Soup Kitchens & Rescue Missions
- Christian Colleges & Bible Training Institutes
- Jail and Prison Ministries

This activism—this social activism—is close to the heart of Jesus. Listen to this extended quotation of Jesus’ words in Matthew 25:31-46—words that almost certainly informed the lyrics of the song that Joshua Lawson played for the offertory this morning.

³¹ “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. ³⁴ Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? ³⁸ And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? ³⁹ And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ ⁴⁰ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’ ⁴¹ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ ⁴⁴ Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?’ ⁴⁵ Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ ⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

According to the Son of Man, King Jesus, the eternal Judge, social righteousness matters. And so, we ought to be whetting our appetites for personal righteousness and social righteousness as we live as citizens of his kingdom. And as with all of the beatitudes this pronouncement comes with a promise. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Why? For they shall be satisfied. That’s the promise.

The Promise: For they shall be satisfied

Satisfaction is being full, having plenty, even more than plenty. To be satisfied is to be stuffed—like the feeling you have after Thanksgiving dinner...when there are still leftovers for a few more meals. Being satisfied was the experience of those 5,000 men and their families who were miraculously fed by Jesus with five loaves and two fishes. The text says they were “satisfied” *and* there were 12 baskets of leftover food to boot!

So, we must ask, “how are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness satisfied?”

Well, in one sense the satisfaction is enjoyed here and now. Growing in personal righteousness comes with great satisfaction—the joy of knowing God and doing his will far outweigh the momentary and fleeting pleasures of sin.

And anyone who has devoted himself to social reform initiatives knows the joy of seeing societal change—an unwed mother who has the courage to choose life, a drug addict who finds freedom from substance abuse, an impoverished family back on their feet.

So, these success stories bring great satisfaction and provide the motivation to press on in our desire toward righteousness—personal and social. But for every success story, there seems to be a struggle (or even failure), which leaves us less than satisfied in the here and now. Which is why we must remember that the satisfaction that Jesus promises is “eschatological satisfaction.” That is, satisfaction in the age to come.

Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be ultimately satisfied when King Jesus returns in righteousness and justice. He will come to sort the sheep from the goats. And he will come to usher the righteous into eternal life. And in his new heavens and new earth there will be no unrighteousness—all will be right according to God’s standard. In the eschatological kingdom there will be no injustice—Jesus the Just will see to that. And most importantly, we will be satisfied in the presence of our righteous God forever and ever.

So, may we experience the blessing of kingdom desires—growing desires for righteousness personally and socially—with confidence in the promise that we will be satisfied!

Benediction—Numbers 6:24-26

²⁴ *The Lord bless you and keep you;*

²⁵ *the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;*

²⁶ *the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.*

ⁱ <https://www.nae.net/what-is-an-evangelical/>