

Kingdom Attitudes

PART 4 • MATTHEW 5:6

Blessed Are Those Who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness

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Four Lakes Church of Christ • Madison, Wisconsin

August 21, 2022



It is good to be together this morning! If you are visiting with us today, we are glad that you are here, we would invite you to fill out a visitor card online, and we would also give the reminder that the elements for the Lord's Supper are available on the table in the entryway.

We are here this morning to worship God and to preach the good news that Jesus gave his life for us on the cross. He was buried, he was raised up on the third day, and we obey that good news by turning to God in faith, turning away from sin, and by putting our trust in God through our obedience to his command to be baptized, immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins.

The first example this week comes to us from Alexander Rodichev, who is now serving God in a refugee camp in far southwest Ukraine, near the border with Romania. Alexander has studied at the Bear Valley Bible Institute, based in Denver. This is where I am heading for a series of lectures in September. But in Ukraine, Alexander reports that "One more soul is saved. We are welcoming Dasha in our forever family." We are so thankful for the good news out of Ukraine this week.

And then, the next several examples come to us through Joshua Notarte who has been doing some preaching in the Philippines lately. One post said that nine had been baptized, another said that 35 had been baptized in one day, and there were others as well. I'm sharing this one since it is rather unique, with the baptism taking place under a dam.

In this next one, they are making their own dam somewhere! We can hardly imagine putting rocks in a river to make it deep enough for a baptism. But, this is what they were doing. By moving those rocks, they made it just deep enough to immerse someone in water for the forgiveness of their sins. And there were several baptized in this location.

And then there was one more picture I wanted to share – from the same gospel preacher, but this is a picture of one of the churches along the way. I hope we notice the tarp! I know we've been needing a new roof on this building, we have at least one estimate so far. But here we have a congregation of God's people meeting under a tarp suspended over several poles, and they are standing, sitting on the ground, on benches, and on lawn chairs. We are so blessed to have a comfortable place to worship this morning. But we share the pictures of the baptisms by way of encouragement. If this is something you still need to do, please pull me aside after worship.

If you are joining us online or on the phone today, send a message to fourlakeschurch@gmail.com or give me a call or send a text to 608-224-0274. We would love to study together. And if you would like to be restored to God's family, or if you are already a Christian and would like to be considered a part of the church here, please reach out to one of the shepherds as well.

By the way, some of you who are members may have noticed the latest financial statement in your cubbyhole today. Stuart does a great job with this, just printing the check register every few months! As I grew up down in Crystal Lake, our treasurer at the time was an Exxon executive who generated 8-page financial reports on a monthly basis, "Account 108c, our paper clip fund, is a bit low this month," and so on. Those reports were over my head! Here, though, we simply have a record of every check that is written and every deposit that is made – open, transparent, and very simple. If you have any questions or concerns, get in touch with Stuart or with one of the shepherds. Concerning our weekly collection and the four ways we have of doing that, a week or two I was wondering how that's coming along. So, I asked Stuart for a rough breakdown of how we are giving using the four methods, and this is what he came up with:

- Roughly 3% comes from those who mail their checks the old-fashioned way, using an actual check and a stamp on an envelope.
- 32% comes from those of you who put something in the box on the wall in the entryway (either checks or cash).
- 28% comes from those of you who give through Tithely (this can be done on a one-time basis or can also set up on a recurring basis).
- And then 37% comes from those of us who have made an arrangement with our bank to automatically mail a check each week. We use UW Credit Union, and they describe this as "Web Pay." I don't know whether all financial institutions call it this, but Josh Yancy was the first to try this out several years ago, and it worked quite well. His bank would mail a check each week, it would show up, and he would put it in the basket. And when COVID hit, more of us took advantage of that option.

Speaking for myself and our family, we have enjoyed having that check automatically sent each week. When I go out of town or if I'm sick, I don't need to remember to leave a check or make it up when I get home. The downside, of course, is that I don't think about our giving as much, and to please God, it has to be done cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:7). And that's why I am thankful that we have made a point of mentioning our giving at the end of each service, so that we can remember what we are doing. Anyway, I was curious about the breakdown, and I thought some of you might be as well.

This morning, let's be turning once again to Matthew 5 as we return to our series of lessons on the "Beatitudes" or "Kingdom Attitudes," as found in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus, of course, has just started preaching that **"the kingdom of heaven is at hand,"** and he starts with a series of eight statements where he uses a word that we translate into English as **"blessed"** or **"happy."**

Three weeks ago, we started with the first statement (in Matthew 5:3), where Jesus says, **"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."** We learned that those who are willing to recognize their spiritual poverty before the Lord are those who will be given the kingdom of heaven.

Two weeks ago, we moved along to Matthew 5:4, where Jesus says, **"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."** We looked at the benefits of weeping, and then we noted that Jesus truly came to this earth to comfort, to stand beside us in our grief.

And then, last week, we looked at Matthew 5:5, where Jesus says, ***“Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.”*** We looked at gentleness not as weakness, but as power under control, and then we looked at what Jesus meant when he said that the gentle would inherit the earth.

This morning, we return to Matthew 5, and we come to verse 6, where Jesus says, ***“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”*** Again, this one is also very easy to memorize, ***“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”*** And as our custom has been, I’d like for us to note the blessing itself, and then we will close by taking a look at the reward.

I. **First of all, then, let’s focus in on the BLESSING itself, as Jesus says, **“BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS.”****

In a sense, most of us can understand at least something of what Jesus says here when he refers to hunger and thirst. All of us have been hungry at some point. We have felt the need for food! In fact, you might be feeling that need for food right now. Every few hours, we sense that there’s something missing. And usually, we fill that need almost immediately. And so, in our society, we generally eat at least three times a day, often with snacks in between. We may be hungry, but very briefly. Perhaps we fast, skipping a meal here and there, for health or spiritual reasons. Perhaps we’ve gone without food for surgery or a medical procedure. Generally, though, our hunger is very temporary. Hunger, for us, is when something comes up and we eat lunch at 1 instead of at noon. In fact, we are practically swimming in an abundance of food. I went to Woodman’s this morning to get my weekly avocados, and I was almost overwhelmed with the variety and the color in the produce section (red, and green, and orange, and purple, and yellow), food from literally all around the world. What a blessing! And when my wife asks me if I’m hungry, she’s not asking whether I’m on the brink of starving, but she’s pretty much asking whether I might be able to handle another meal. And then when we do have a snack or a meal, our problem is that we have too much food. I sit down with a Reese’s Peanut Butter Cup, and the package says that this is two servings. No, it is not. I am no quitter!

Back in Jesus’ time, though, hunger and thirst were truly compelling. Starvation was a very real danger. In those days, and in many places even today, hunger and thirst are overwhelming motivators. And the longer we go without food, the more motivating our hunger becomes. We develop this deep craving for something to eat. It’s not just a passing interest, but it becomes an overbearing pursuit, even to the point that nothing else matters. Being “hangry” is a real thing, isn’t it! When we get hungry, we get desperate. We think of the Donner Party, on their way to California in the winter of 1846-47 when they get stranded by a blizzard. They ate leather and then they ate each other. Or we think of the rugby team that crashed in the Andes back in 1972. Hunger is motivating.

And if someone does not get hungry or if they ignore their hunger, it’s a sign of trouble, isn’t it? If someone refuses to eat or doesn’t eat enough over an extended period of time, that’s a problem – whether it’s a newborn, a teen, or an adult. The first time we ever visited a psychiatric hospital was to visit a fellow classmate down in Tennessee. She was struggling with anorexia and had to be admitted against her will for her own good. Hunger, then, is normal and God designed us in this way for our own good. We need to eat to be healthy, we must eat in order to live, and hunger makes sure that we do.

Well, in this case, Jesus gives a blessing on those who hunger and thirst for ***“righteousness.”*** As I understand it, ***“righteousness”*** is basically conformity to what is right or just. And God is righteousness. God is our standard here. Now, as I was doing the research for today’s lesson, I ran across a number of sources explaining that our

hunger and thirst for righteousness is expressed through reading the Bible, and prayer, and by coming to worship. And I understand the thought, but it's interesting to me that this seems to turn this whole thing into some kind of an obligation. And we certainly do have some obligations here, but Jesus pictures this as **"hunger"** and **"thirst."** This is a need more than an obligation or a commandment. I don't know about all of you, but I don't go through my day saying, "Well, it's time to fuel my body again so I don't die! I have to go eat something." That's not the way hunger works. Hunger and thirst are natural. I'm out mowing the grass and working in the yard for a few hours, and I start thinking, "I could really go for a hamburger!" Yes, I suppose I am "obligated" to eat, but I don't really think of it as an obligation. I look forward to eating. It's more of an urge, a feeling that something else is needed. We are "hungry," in a sense. In a similar way, the person who hungers and thirsts for righteousness is the person who is hungry to get back in a right relationship with God.

And hunger is ongoing, isn't it? I might eat a huge meal and feel like I'll never need to eat again as long as I live, but that's not really true, is it? Back in the olden days, I could put a pretty good dent in the Ponderosa buffet, but sure enough, the next morning, I was always hungry again, ready for more food. Hunger and thirst are constant and consistent. So also with the hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Now, the problem is: Sometimes we long for things that are not really good for us. I long for bacon. I long for Really Reese's to be the flavor of the day down at Culver's. I long for the brat cookout at Bavaria Sausage every Wednesday and Friday from 11 a.m. – 2 p.m. And even though I haven't had them for many years, I long for the all you can eat breadsticks at Fazoli's. I'm already longing for the In-N-Out double-double burger on my upcoming trip to Denver in September. Well, in the same way, we often long for those things that are not good for us spiritually. The Prodigal Son longed for what the pigs were eating. So also, we might try to quench our spiritual thirst with something that doesn't really satisfy. Perhaps we make a swap. We think of what Paul wrote in Romans 1:22-23, **"Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures."** They were worshiping the creature rather than the Creator. Sometimes, we try to satisfy our spiritual hunger with things that aren't really good for us, spiritual junk food, even poison – we can distract ourselves from our spiritual hunger by filling our lives with possessions, or a relationship, a career, or maybe a substance or a drink. We think of Jeremiah's rebuke in Jeremiah 2:12-13,

***"Be appalled, O heavens, at this,
And shudder, be very desolate," declares the LORD.
"For My people have committed two evils:
They have forsaken Me,
The fountain of living waters,
To hew for themselves cisterns,
Broken cisterns
That can hold no water.***

Do you see what they did there? They not only turned away from God, but they filled that empty void in their lives with something else, something they thought might give them some sense of meaning.

Or, we think Isaiah's invitation and warning in Isaiah 55,

"Hey there! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters;

And you who have no money come, buy and eat.

Come, buy wine and milk

Without money and without cost.

“Why do you spend money for what is not bread,

And your wages for what does not satisfy?

Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good,

And delight yourself in abundance.

“Incline your ear and come to Me.

Listen, that you may live;

In the same way, Jesus, also promises a blessing on those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. So, we think of hunger, and then we imagine having that same kind of gnawing hunger or longing for God and his righteousness, the ongoing and never-ending constant urge to be right with God. Imagine having this constant thirst for God, an ache in our souls until we are truly pleasing to God. Augustine, I believe, might have been one of the first to describe the idea that all people are created with a God-sized hole in their hearts, “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.” This is basically what King David says in Psalm 63:1,

O God, You are my God; I shall seek You earnestly;

My soul thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for You,

In a dry and weary land where there is no water.

Or, in a passage that may be a bit more familiar to us, in Psalm 42:1 (written by the sons of Korah), ***“As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God.”***

Before we move on to the reward, I would also note that Jesus gives a blessing not on those who ARE righteous, or on those who have ACHIEVED righteousness, or on those who THINK they are righteous, but on those who ***“hunger and thirst”*** for righteousness. The idea is that this spiritual hunger is ongoing, it’s a process. The blessing is on those who recognize their own ongoing need for righteousness.

II. This leads us to the REWARD, *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, FOR THEY SHALL BE SATISFIED.”*****

As we read these words, I can’t help but think of what we sometimes see in advertising, *****PPT***** “100% SATISFACTION GUARANTEED.” When we hunger and thirst for righteousness, Jesus promises that we will be ***“satisfied.”*** And this isn’t saying that we will accomplish satisfaction, but this is a blessing, a promise from God. If we hunger and thirst for righteousness, we will be ***“satisfied”*** or ***“filled”*** (as some translations might put it). The word apparently goes back to the idea of “grass,” and it’s the idea of an animal grazing until it is completely full. As David says, ***“The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters.”*** If we seek the Lord, if we hunger and thirst for his righteousness, he promises satisfaction. If we search, we will find what we are looking for. Spiritually speaking, if I want to grow closer to God? Satisfaction guaranteed! Spiritually speaking, if I’m hungry for a more godly marriage? Satisfaction guaranteed! Spiritually speaking, if I’m hungry to learn more about God and his word? Satisfaction guaranteed! Spiritually speaking, if I’m hungry to break free from a destructive or sinful behavior? Satisfaction guaranteed! If I want what God wants, if I hunger and thirst for righteousness, I will be satisfied.

As Jesus will go on to say in Matthew 7:7-8, and as we plan on singing together in just a moment, ***“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.”*** We have the Ethiopian treasurer as an example. Here’s a man who was searching the scriptures to find God, God made a way, and the man from Ethiopia obeyed, because he hungered and thirsted for righteousness.

Conclusion:

As we close our thoughts on this passage, I’d just like to ask: Why do we sometimes not have this appetite for righteousness? I mean, Jesus gives a blessing on those who do hunger and thirst for righteousness, so I think we need to recognize that not everybody has this hunger (in the same way that not all people are poor in spirit, not all people mourn, and not all people are gentle) – in the same way, not all people are hungry and thirsty for righteousness. The question is: Why? Why are we not always hunger? And if I could tie this back to physical hunger, I think the reason is: Many of us have been doing some snacking! When our parents told us we couldn’t have a snack at four o’clock in the afternoon because it would ruin our appetite for dinner, so also, it is very easy to substitute real spiritual nutrition with what may be good, but less good, or even evil.

First of all, let’s just touch on evil snacking. I’m thinking of what Peter wrote in 1 Peter 2:1-3 when he said, ***“Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.”*** So, there are things we make a decision to put aside, and then we replace those evil things with a healthy appetite. I’m just saying that if we are not hungry and thirsty for righteousness, it may be because we have filled ourselves with some evil things that really need to be put aside. So, the first practical application here is that evil things can ruin our spiritual appetite.

And then, secondly, we there are times when we might substitute real spiritual nutrition with things that are good, but less good. I’m thinking of the incident with Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38-42,

³⁸ Now as they were traveling along, [Jesus] entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. ³⁹ She had a sister called Mary, who was seated at the Lord’s feet, listening to His word. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him and said, “Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me.” ⁴¹ But the Lord answered and said to her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; ⁴² but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her.”

Obviously, Martha was doing a good thing by serving the Lord, but it seems that Mary was the one who was truly hungry and thirsty for righteousness. Sometimes, then, even good things have a way of crowding out those other things that are truly important. Sometimes, we may need to slow down and reset ourselves spiritually, reevaluating what is truly important in this life. Do we truly hunger and thirst for righteousness? Or have we substituted what is good but less important for what is most important?

Are we struggling to work up an appetite? If so, I would leave us with one more question, and that is: Why did Jesus die? Most of us would answer: To save us, or to forgive our sins. And that would be correct. However, I would share one very short reference from 1 Peter 2:24, where Peter refers to the crucifixion and says that ***“...He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for***

by His wounds you were healed.” Interesting, isn’t it? Why did Jesus die? He died ***“so that we might die to sin and live to RIGHTEOUSNESS.”*** He died so that we might live to righteousness, that we might hunger for righteousness, that we might have a passion for righteousness.

Before we continue with the Lord’s Supper, let’s close our study by going to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

Thank you for speaking to us through your word this morning. We pray that we might develop a true hunger and thirst for righteousness. Bless the Grodi family as they travel. Bless Abe as he recovers from surgery. Bless our seniors as they face the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. Bless our efforts to help the children in this neighborhood.

Thank you, Father, for hearing our prayer. In Jesus we pray, AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com