

## BLESSED ARE THE HUNGRY AND THIRSTY

### Message 6

Scripture: Romans 4:1-12

INTRO: Well, we come to one of my favorite beatitudes in Matthew 5:6. It says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled." Jesus has just entered the ministry. After His baptism by John He went to the wedding at Cana, and then He went to His first Passover in Jerusalem. He has just returned to the Galilee area. He has called several disciples and has made one brief preaching tour in the Galilee area.

Because He had done some healing and helped some demonized people, great multitudes began to follow Him. In the preaching and teaching of Jesus, they were seeing something so different from the religiosity of the Scribes and Pharisees, and it seems to me they recognized that here was a Man that spoke the truth, that many began to follow Him and listen to Him.

And so, Matthew 5:1 says that when He saw the multitudes, He went up into a mountain and when He was seated His disciples came to Him and He opened His mouth and taught them. We have seen enough already to see that His teaching is foreign to the thinking of the world in general. Here is divine truth. Here are the principles of the kingdom of God.

I have proposed to you, and I am indebted to others for the view, but that these beatitudes are progressive in nature. Before anyone gets anywhere with God, he must first become poor in spirit. One must not first become meek. One cannot even become meek unless one first becomes poor in spirit. When one becomes truly poor in spirit, it will lead to mourning. One will mourn one's own inner spiritual depravity. And when that happens in reality, one will begin to become meek!

In our last message we considered that the meek will inherit the earth. I proposed to you that the meek inherit the earth in the millennium. But the final fulfilment of this promise will be the new earth. Some day God will make a new heaven and a new earth, and the saved will inherit the new earth! Here they will live in the presence of God for all eternity!

#### IV. BLESSED ARE THE HUNGRY & THIRSTY

##### A. The Character Of The Hungry & Thirsty

So we come now to the fourth beatitude which says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." I mentioned to you in the last message that J. Dwight Pentecost, in his great book on Bible prophecy called, "Things To Come" gives as the first characteristic of the millennial age, 'righteousness.'

Let us look first then at the most important word in this beatitude, righteousness. Just what is righteousness? Well, the root word is 'right.' It is the opposite of wrong. In the NT the word is 'dikaios'. In Matthew 1:19, it says, "Then Joseph her husband, being a *just* man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly." Joseph was a 'just' man. He was a *right* man. In Matthew 20 Jesus gives a parable of men who were hired laborers to work in his vineyard. He found some earlier and then some at the third hour and some at the sixth hour and some at the ninth hour. And at the eleventh hour he still found some idle men and he asked, "Why are you standing here idle?" And Matthew 20:7 says, "They said to him, 'Because no one hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is *right* you will receive.' The word 'right' is the original word 'dikaios'. From this word *dikaios*, comes the word 'dikaiosune'. There is the word of our text translated *righteousness*. So, what is righteousness? It is doing right!

Now, before we go on to anything else, we must settle something very important here. In my view, we cannot go on until we understand this very important matter. There are two kinds of righteousness in Scripture. There is imputed righteousness and there is actual righteousness. Let us look first at imputed righteousness. For that, we go to Romans 4 (read 1-8). That speaks of imputed righteousness. In verse 6 it is called *righteousness apart from works*. It is righteousness that someone else has done and which is then imputed to the account of another without the other

having done the righteousness! Now, let me tell you when that happens. It happens when we are saved by faith.

And so I must ask you a question, and if I have done my duty in the past, you will be able to answer this question: What is justification? (It is to be declared righteous.) When we are justified, we are not made righteous, we are declared righteous. So when we repent of our sins and receive Christ by faith, then we are initially justified. Let me add here that the word, to justify; or justification both have the word 'dikaios' as their root. And in initial justification it means to be declared righteous on the basis of the righteous deeds of another.

So there is imputed righteousness, but, there is another kind of righteousness. It is actual righteousness. Go to the book of James chapter 2 (read 14-26). Now you will note that verse 14 indicates that faith alone cannot save. And verse 21 indicates that Abraham was justified by works. Now I ask you, cannot faith alone save? Answer: It cannot. Don't call me a heretic yet. This text says what I am saying. We can be declared righteous at initial salvation by faith alone, just as Abraham was in Genesis 15. But then we have our life to live. So I ask, in our daily life does God want to keep declaring us righteous by imputed righteousness, while we continue to live in drunkenness and immorality? Heaven forbid. In present tense salvation He wants to deliver us from sin so that we can be declared righteous by how we actually live.

So let me ask you another question; was Abraham justified by works, as James says, or was he justified by faith as Paul says in Romans 4? Do we have a contradiction here? No, we don't. In Romans 4 Paul is speaking about initial justification, being declared righteous by faith. Well, go to Genesis 15 (read 1-6). Here is what Romans 4 is talking about. Abraham was justified before God. And on what ground was he justified here? On the ground of his faith. He believed God.

But James is speaking about Abraham's justification when he offered his son Isaac on Mount Moriah. That took place

some 30 years after the justification in Genesis 15. So we go back to James now (read 2:21-23). Now, notice that this justification takes place when Abraham offered his son Isaac on the altar. This is about 30 years after Abraham was justified by faith. And when he offered his son on the altar he was justified by works. He offered his son.

Now let me show you how different these two kinds of righteousness and justification are. When I repent of my sins and receive Christ, and He forgives me my sins and adds His righteousness to my account, I am declared righteous on the basis of the righteousness of another. But I cannot live the rest of my life counting on that one act of declaration. I must now learn to live right in life. You see, before Jesus was born, the Lord told Joseph, "You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). He would not save His people in their sins, but from their sins.

So, let me give you an example. When I became a Christian I was a cigarette smoker. I struggled with this addiction. And each time I smoked I confessed my sin and so life went on until one day I got desperate and threw myself on the floor and cried out to God and said, "I can't overcome." And then, from that day on, slowly I overcame. You see, I hungered for righteousness, actual righteousness. But now, if the devil should accuse me before God for smoking, and God checked up on me, he would say, "Well, his acts years ago were forgiven because he repented of them, and now he does not smoke. I initially declared him righteous on the basis of his repentance and faith; but I now have to declare him righteous because he in actual fact does not smoke any more. There is no charge against him because he is actually not guilty.

Now, the righteousness in our beatitude, in my view; is not for initial justification. It does not have to do with my standing before God; it has to do with my actual state. It does not have to do with my position in Christ; it has to do with my practice in life. When it says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness" it is not talking about being declared righteous initially, it is

talking about actual righteousness. May I ask you, are you caught in some addiction; some bondage; some sin? I ask you, do you hunger and thirst to live right actually? May I tell you, unless you have come to hate sin, unless you have come to desire to live right more than anything else, you will not likely come free. Pray to God and say, "Oh Lord, make me hungry, hungry, hungry for actual righteousness. If you fail, repent and he will declare you righteous, and do that until you actually live righteous.

You see, when Jesus said blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, it is not talking about initial, justifying righteousness. It is not talking about the believer's standing, or his position in Christ. That happened when this man became poor in spirit and mourned his sinfulness. It is talking about his state, his practice, how he lives in actual life. This man in our present beatitude has already been initially justified. But like Paul, after he was justified he has found that the things he does not want to do he does; and the things he should do, he doesn't do. He has found that foul root of sinfulness and selfishness deep within. And now he has come to the place where he has cried out, "Oh, wretched man that I am. Who shall deliver me from this body of death? He has become hungry and thirsty for righteousness. He wants to be able to live right.

I want to make another point here I feel is very important. When I was just saved, there was a very common teaching in the church and it was that the believer was no longer under the law. The picture given was that in the OT, Christians were under the law but now, under grace in the NT we are no longer under the law. There are, I'm sure, still remnants of that teaching floating around. I bought into that teaching, though I was almost 100% ignorant of Bible doctrine, having grown up in a traditional church with little Bible teaching.

Out of that teaching that the NT Christian was no longer under the law, came Christian outlaws. By that I mean, they thought you could live just any old way that suited them, since they were under grace and not under law. Now

it is true that after Christ came, much of the ceremonial law was fulfilled so that we do not sacrifice animals any more and so on. Also, many of the social laws do not apply to us now. But when it comes to the moral law, it is as much in force today as it ever was. When it says, "Thou shalt not steal", that applies exactly the same way today as it did when it was written. When it says, "Thou shalt not lie" it applies as much today as ever.

You see, our subject is righteousness. And the moral law shows us what is right and what is wrong. "Thou shalt not lie", tells us just as plainly to tell the truth. There is even a lot in the social laws that shows us what is right and what is wrong as we interact with other people.

So go to Romans 7 (read 1-6). Such passages are used to show that Christians are not under the law. But this led to many so called Christians living in sin because they were not under the law. But that is far from the teaching of Scripture. That is far from hungering and thirsting for righteousness.

So, look at chapter 8 (read 1-4). How is it that the Christian is not 'under' the law? It is like this. Let us say you are driving down the highway going 30 kms an hour over the speed limit. You are under the law, and if the police see that, they will stop you and fine you. But, let us say you are going speed limit. You are not under the law of speeding because you are doing it. The policeman will not bother you. Why? Because the law has no complaint about you.

How is the Christian not under the law? Well, look at verse 4 again (read). One does not need to fear the law when one is obeying it. Now look at Romans 6 (read 12-16). Why does sin not have dominion over the believer? Because he is not under the law. And why is he not under the law? He is doing what the law requires. He is not lying; not stealing; not cheating, or we might simply say he is living right. That is the whole aim of the Gospel!

Why is the Christian not under the law? Because he has hungered and thirsted for righteousness. He has filled

himself with the Word of God and is obedient to the Word of God! That is why! Jesus said if you love Me, keep my commandments! Now let me be quick to say that we do not get saved by keeping the law, even the moral law. We keep the moral law because we are saved. This man in our beatitude has already become poor in spirit; has mourned his sinful condition; has repented and trusted Christ and become meek. It is now that he hungers and thirsts after righteousness. You see, true salvation must bring about a true hunger and thirst for actual righteousness. Salvation enables us to keep the moral law, or simply, to live right. It is possible, through the blood of Christ to come free from lying or pornography or alcohol or smoking or any other sin. We do not stop lying to get saved. We stop lying because we are saved.

So, let me summarize this far. When Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness..." He is, in my estimation, talking about real, actual righteousness in life. He is talking about living right. He is not talking about imputed righteousness. Furthermore, He is talking about the righteousness that is set out in the moral law, or other laws that are right and apply to us, whether given in the Old or New Testament.

And so, let us take a moment to look at the illustration the Lord uses to describe what happens to a man who hungers and thirsts for righteousness. First he has become poor in spirit then he has mourned his inner depravity and has become meek, and now, from deep within is this insatiable hunger and thirst for righteousness. It seems there are many Christians who do not have this deep hunger and thirst for righteousness. That is a bad sign. May I ask you, how is it with you?

And so, the Lord, to get the point across as to what happens to a person who is truly spiritual, says that he comes to a place where he wants righteousness above all else. He desires truth in the inward parts, and he wants to do right. He is not so concerned about what it will cost him. He wants to do right. And the Lord illustrates

what will happen to a person like this by using two things every human being can understand; hunger and thirst.

I would like to have class with you right now and I would ask you to write down a definition for both hunger and thirst. You see, here are two human desires that make one point in what Jesus is talking about. It is well worth pondering Jesus' words right here. So we ask, just what is hunger? Well, it is a physical desire or appetite or craving for nourishment for the body from food. You feel this hunger in your stomach. And when hunger grows, eventually your mind forgets about all other things and you seek one thing only, and that is to satisfy that craving for food.

Hunger can become so powerful that it can make a righteous man steal in order to satisfy those desires. It can become more powerful than that. On October 13, 1972, an airplane crashed in the Andes mountains between Chile and Argentina. According to an internet article, Dr. Roberto Canessa was one of 16 men who survived. And Dr. Canessa remembers having to eat the flesh of friends to stay alive. He told the Sun newspaper: 'It was repugnant. Through the eyes of our civilized society it was a disgusting decision. My dignity was on the floor having to grab a piece of my dead friend and eat it in order to survive. 'But then I thought of my mother and wanted to do my best to get back to see her. I swallowed a piece and it was a huge step..'"

But what is thirst? Well, it is very similar to hunger, only now it is for liquid that the body cries. Thirst can become so powerful that one will do almost anything to get something to drink. But there is something else important about the illustration of hunger and thirst. Food and drink are the two things we require daily in order to maintain a comfortable and healthy life. They are things we must constantly put effort into, to supply them for our lives. We need air as well, but it comes naturally. Food and drink we must provide or we die.

Now hunger and thirst are the body's way of letting us know that it is in need of sustenance. Most of us do not



have to spend any time about thinking that we must breathe to stay alive. Some have that problem, but for most it comes natural. In almost all places there is the right mixture of those gases to keep the body alive. But eating and drinking have to be done by choice. Each person, in normal life, has to look after his or her own eating and drinking. So it is in the spiritual life with spiritual food. You have to make the conscious decision to do it, or you will soon get thin.

Furthermore, fallen man is not naturally spiritually hungry and thirsty. Scripture says the natural man is spiritually dead. There is no life in him. But when such a person hears the Gospel, finds he is a sinner and lost and going to hell, then he or she must make a conscious decision to deal with matters as the Scripture says. When repentance and faith truly take place, such a person is born again. And as soon as a person is born again, he or she needs spiritual sustenance.

1 Peter 2:2 says, "...as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby..." And the truly born again person will as naturally hunger for righteousness, as a new born baby will hunger for sustenance. But as physical food is required on a very regular basis, so spiritual food is required on a regular basis. In order for the spiritual life to survive, it must have sustenance, just like the physical body. And it is most natural that if we do not find spiritual sustenance that we will hurt spiritually, and if it happens for too long, we may even die spiritually.

Furthermore, if we do not eat properly spiritually, sin will want to grow and spiritual sickness will set in. These are dangers of spiritual mal nourishment. And if that happens, righteousness will suffer. The Scripture says that righteousness exalts a nation. Righteousness exalts a town; a church; a family.

Now I want you to notice something important. We are not to hunger and thirst for blessedness. That is the problem of many. Blessedness wants to recede from those who seek it. Blessedness comes to those who meet the conditions

such as poor in spirit; mourning; meekness and hungering and thirsting for righteousness.

Now one would most naturally say that it is not those who hunger and thirst, but those who are filled who are blessed. But consider for a moment the blessing of hunger. If a person did not hunger or thirst, life would become a chore. I heard of a girl who had a disease and she could not feel pain. And do you know what her mother prayed for her? She prayed that her daughter would be able to feel pain. When one cannot feel pain, one can easily die from things you don't even know are happening. Pain, in many ways, is a blessing. It is like that with hunger. If we do not hunger, we may not seek to be filled. And if we did not hunger again and again, we would not grow nor maintain our health.

But the hunger and thirst of our passage is spiritual in nature, not physical. The Lord is using something we understand from the physical realm to help us understand a spiritual truth. We have here man's two greatest daily desires. And both of these desires picture one spiritual desire : righteousness!

Well, one of the major signs of the truly born again person is to hunger and thirst for righteousness. So let me explain briefly the difference between holiness and righteousness. Holiness is basically separation from sin. Righteousness is simply the state of being right or doing right. When God had created Adam and Eve He told them to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it; and to have dominion over the fish, birds and every living thing on earth (1:28). Obedience to that was righteousness. But, God said, "I don't want you to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Gen. 2:16-17). Not eating from that tree separated them from evil, and thus they were holy.

Well, you know the rest of the story, how they disobeyed and ate from the forbidden tree; and we also all know the sin nature we have inherited from that sin. And now, we have this great hunger and thirst for doing wrong. By our nature, we long for sin. And so Scripture says that all

have sinned and come short of the glory of God. And furthermore, we have little interest in righteousness by nature.

And now God's dilemma was, how to make man desire righteousness. So He sent His only begotten Son into the world to die for sinful man. And through that death, He provided man with imputed righteousness so that man might gain an actual, personal hunger for righteousness. But how would He bring man to such a blessed state?

Well, He would first have to cause man to become poor in spirit. Man would have to be brought to a state in which he could see his hopeless and lost condition. And how would He do that? Well, He would do that through the preaching and teaching of the Word of God. And then, once He had been able to bring man to that state, then man would mourn his sinfulness and lack of righteousness.

Then, once man had become poor in spirit and mourned his sinful condition he would be ready for the good news of Jesus' death on his behalf and man would then repent and come to Christ for salvation. And when that happened, he would become meek. And when man became meek, something very great would happen inside of him. The longing to sin would be replaced by a hunger and thirst for righteousness. And oh, blessed is the man who hungers and thirsts for righteousness!

Truly, here is a test of the new birth; a hunger and thirst for righteousness. These are the main staple of the meek! These two major senses in the born again person cause him to desire righteousness! You see, this man has become unworldly. Righteousness has overridden his desire for money or gold or possessions or sensual satisfaction. He now wants to live right. This is directly opposite of the lost.

#### B. The Promise To The Hungry & Thirsty

So, let us briefly consider the promise that is given to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. The promise is that they shall be filled. A person who never

hungers or thirsts spiritually will die. And this death is eternal hell fire. Oh, blessed is the man who comes to the state of hungering and thirsting after righteousness. Why? Well, the promise here is that he will be filled. And we must ask, filled with what? Well, righteousness, of course.

But just as physical hunger comes again and again, so should the believer's spiritual hunger. So, when the believer takes in the divine bread, the bread of life, he will be filled. And that will cause him to grow in righteousness. And when he grows in righteousness he will find new areas that need to be dealt with. So he repents of any wrong he discovers, and then learns to live right. So he will become poor in spirit again and again, because he will see how short he comes of being like Christ. And then he will mourn again. And he will become meek again. And he will hunger and thirst again, and again, and again. That is spiritual growth.

You see, there is an important lesson to be learned from eating and drinking. You cannot hold enough food to last for very long. When you eat it replenishes your body, and then your body burns off all the nutrition and then you hunger again. It is just so with drink as well. And so, when a person gets saved and eats spiritually for the first time, he cannot live for the rest of his life on that initial food. Like in physical life he must get hungry again and again. He cannot go long without food. And so Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." And so, ever after in the Christian life there should be hungering and thirsting and eating and drinking and hungering and thirsting and eating and drinking.

CONCL: So, let us conclude. Our beatitude has been, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled." I have said I believe the righteousness spoken of in our beatitude is practical righteousness. It affects how we live from day to day. It affects how we do business. It affects how we work for our boss. It affects every area of life. It affects

what we listen to; what we read; what we eat or drink; how we think; how we dress; how we drive. It affects all we do.

I mentioned in our last message that J. Dwight Pentecost in his book on prophecy gives as the very first mark of the millennial age that it will be marked by righteousness. I would give as one of the first indicators of the new birth, or a rededication to Christ, a desire for the Word of God and righteousness. Actual righteousness.

You see, when Paul said in Romans 7 that the things he wanted to do he did not do, and the things he did not want to do, he found himself doing he is indicating that he is hungering and thirsting for actual righteousness.

IF TIME: Go with me to Revelation 19. In this chapter we are at the end of the tribulation. The Church, the bride of Christ, is in heaven with the Lord. And Christ and the Church, Christians from the Church age, are about to begin their descent to the earth. So look at verses 6-8 (read). Notice it says that Christ's wife, the Church, has made herself ready. And in verse eight we find she made herself ready by dressing in white. Notice it is called 'fine' linen. It is called clean. It is called bright. And then we are told what that means. Now the KJV says it is the righteousness of the saints. But it is not the word *dikaiousune*, as in Matthew 5:6. It is the word, '*dikaiwmata*'. And the NKJV has rendered it more accurately as 'the righteous acts' of the saints.

Have you ever seen how much time a bride spends on her dress? Somehow that usually becomes one of the main concerns for the bride. Do you know why brides wear white? It comes from this picture of purity and righteousness as pictured in Scripture. May I suggest to you from this text that we are all providing the material for our wedding dress as the bride of Christ by the way we live? Are you and I as concerned about this as a bride is in marriage? We ought to be. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they will have a beautiful wedding dress!