

## Blessed are They Who Desire Righteousness

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7.30.17

Our text is Matthew 5:6. "Blessed are they...." This is the description of the true citizens of the kingdom of heaven. Those who are truly saved by the grace of God, the elect of God you can say. And it says in verse six "...*they are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness.*" They're blessed to have this hunger. I call this in your lesson a holy hunger and the reason I call it holy... and understanding now, the word holy means separate. That's what means it means - to be different in a godly way in this sense. And what I mean by that is this is a hunger and thirst that men and women don't have by nature. Now men and women by nature are hungry. Obviously, we're hungry physically but even in a religious way people are hungry and thirsty for certain things, but not for righteousness. Now let me show you what I mean by that. Look over in Isaiah 51. This is a prophecy of Christ. In Isaiah 51:1 the Lord calls upon the people of Judah through Isaiah. "*Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord:*" Following after righteousness and seeking the Lord are synonymous here. In other words, if you're truly seeking the Lord (that's Jehovah, God who saves, the God of grace, the God of the covenant) you're seeking righteousness, but man by nature does not know righteousness. Now he knows religion, even those human morality and ethics. You know a lot of people would say, well I will try to be a better person or somebody might say well I'm going to join the church. give my heart to Jesus and all that. Let me ask you a question. Are they seeking righteousness? The answer is no.

Look across the page there to Isaiah 51:7 and it will do you well to read this whole chapter because it is really good. He says in verse seven of Isaiah 51, "*Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings.*" Ye that know righteousness. Now throughout the Bible we see examples of men and women who thought they knew righteousness, but they didn't. An example is Cain. He thought he knew righteousness. What righteousness did he know? He knew the righteousness of man or what he thought was the righteousness of man and he brought his works to God to be accepted. Man's standard (fallen, sinful man's standard) of righteousness is always lower - way too low - than God's standard and we could go through the Bible and talk about that. In the New Testament, what did Christ say here and in Matthew five? He says, in verse 20, "*For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.*" You've got to have a righteousness that is way higher than what they're teaching you.

What is righteousness? Mark and I were talking about this before the lesson and I told him this - I said, you know, whenever we talk about the Bible, when we talk about even the gospel and the verses of the Bible, we don't always use what you might say is technically doctrinally precise language. That's okay as long as we don't go astray. But for example, the word righteousness - a lot of times when you see in the Bible the word right, the word righteous or righteousness that word could just as easily be translated just, justice, justified or justification. Righteousness, technically speaking, is a legal term in the New Testament. In the Old Testament it's used in a legal way too but it's used another way and I'll tell you about that just a moment. But it's a legal term, it's not a moral term. But righteousness is the standard, it's the legal standard by which all morality is to be measured. For example, love is a moral term. You say, well I'm going to try to love everybody perfectly and you know we're going to fall short - now why is that? Because our love does not measure up to the standard of righteousness that God requires. Can I do anything in love, in obedience that will measure up to the standard of righteousness that God requires? The answer is no. That's what it means when he says in Romans 3:23. "*For all have sinned, and come short*" (missed the mark) "*of the glory of God;*"

In the Old Testament the word righteous and righteousness is used legally, but it's also used in a business way - Mercantile. For example, when they went to market and they were going to buy something they had a balance, a scale. The worth, the value, the cost of something was to be measured as it weighed against the scale. If you had so much gold you'd weigh that against the the thing you were wanting to buy and it had to balance out. That's where you come to the term iniquity, in equity – it doesn't balance out. You hear the term “the scales of justice” - that's where that comes from. The Lord uses that term to pronounce someone guilty. You remember Belshazzar, the king of Babylon, who was throwing the party using the vessels of the Temple and the handwriting on the wall? Daniel 5:25b-27 *“Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin...27 Tekel; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.”* Now, why is that important? Well look over at Matthew chapter 7.

It's important to understand that man by nature does not know righteousness. He thinks he does but he doesn't. And here in Matthew 7:21-23 it says, *“21 Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? 23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”* How could the Lord call that iniquity? Now you know what most preachers say about that don't you? Well, they just weren't sincere in what they did. Well where does it say that in Matthew 7? It doesn't, does it? If that is the case, is your righteousness that you plead before God, is it your sincerity? And if it is, how sincere do you have to be? Think about that. Well it doesn't say anything about their sincerity there. What's the context of Matthew 7? What's he talking about? Well, he starts out talking about the broad road that leads to destruction and the narrow way that leads to life. What is the narrow way that leads to life? It's the gospel way. It's the way of righteousness through the Lord Jesus Christ. And then he talks about how false preachers preach a false message which is a cursed tree that will produce no good fruit. In other words, sinners aren't going to be saved under the preaching of a false gospel. And then he says “Many will say unto them Lord Lord haven't we done [this]...” Now preaching in his name, casting out demons, many wonderful works, is all under the category of what the world would call moral and good, but it falls short of the standard - the standard of righteousness. What is righteousness? It's perfect satisfaction to God's law and justice. That's what it is. And anything that falls short of that is iniquity, sin, evil. That's what the Scripture says. Now that's what's offensive to the natural man. You mean to tell me that all my efforts to worship, all my efforts in praying..... Someone asked me one time does God hear the prayer of an unbeliever. Think about that. Well what is the basis and the ground of prayer to God (acceptable prayer to God)? We have a what? A great high priest whom unbelievers deny. Now as far as hearing it - is God aware of it? He heard the prayer of the Pharisee in Luke 18 but he didn't accept it. He rejected it. This man went away unjustified. The basis of prayer is righteousness that's found where? Only in Christ. And that's what this is talking about right here in Matthew chapter 5. The gospel is the revelation of the righteousness, not of men, but of God. And those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, they are sanctified because (and how do you know?) because it says they're going to be filled. That hunger that they have for righteousness is going to be satisfied. That thirst they have after righteousness is going to be quenched. How? Where? In who? Not in themselves, not in others, not in their denomination, not in their church, not in their ceremonies, only in Christ and his righteousness imputed. That's it . That's what he's talking about.

Christ came to fulfill the righteousness of the law. The Holy Spirit gives us that hunger and thirst in Holy Spirit conviction. Look over at John 16. What happens is, the Holy Spirit through the

word of God shows us that we have no righteousness by which to be justified and may right and reconciled to God. He shows us that our best efforts to be righteous will always fail. He shows us that that our best works will not make us so in the sight of God. And then he shows us that there is righteousness to be found in one person, by his one work, and that's the Lord Jesus Christ.

Look at John 16:8-9. *“And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: 9 Of sin, because they believe not on me;”* Christ is the one who was manifested to take away our sin. If we don't have Christ, what do we have left? Sin. What did he do on the cross? He was made sin, our sin debt was imputed to him, and he satisfied God's justice. He drank damnation dry. So without him all that's left, as we stand before God, is sin and sin demands death. Then he in says verse 10 *“Of righteousness, (but righteousness how? Now think about it. Righteousness because I'm going to make you a better person? No. Righteousness because you're going to turn over a new leaf? No. Righteousness because Christ goes to the father ) because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more;”* Now how did Christ go to the father? He went to the father as the one who died on the cross, was buried, arose again the third day, the one who made an end of our sins, the one who of brought in everlasting righteousness for God's people. That's how he went to the father. As the surety and the substitute of God's people. In other words, what he's saying here is if you're convicted of sin you're going to know that you have no righteousness but that which Christ has accomplished on Calvary that's imputed to you. You're not going to look anywhere else. One who is convinced of sin, one who is blessed of God, who truly hungers and thirst after righteousness, will find no satisfaction from that hunger, no quenching of that thirst anywhere else, but in Christ crucified and raised from the dead. And then he says in verse 11, *“Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.”* That's a way of saying that when Christ died on that cross and was judged for my sin, I was judged in him, and I'm accepted before God in him. Listen, don't look within your selves to find righteousness. It's not there. You say, but I have the Holy Spirit indwelling me. If you're a believer, you do. He is righteous in Himself, but we're still sinners saved by grace and that's all we'll ever be and we'll talk about that in just a moment. But that that's the issue - do you know righteousness? If you do, if you really know righteousness as taught by God, in his word, according to his holy nature, then you won't be able to find it anywhere but in Christ. You won't find it anywhere else. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, they shall be filled.

You know everything in this bible - from Genesis to Revelation - is to be measured right here. Is it acceptable with God? Am I accepted with God? The Bible says we're accepted in the beloved. That means we're accepted in Christ. When I worship, we've met here this morning to worship. Does God accept that? Is he pleased with that? You know there are people who say no. And there are people who say yes, obviously. When I pray.... okay, were commanded to be people of prayer. You know in the old tabernacle, they had the altar of incense, which they kept it burning. It was in the holy place, not in the holy of holies, but in the holy place and that represented the prayers of the saints going up before God in the intercessory work of Christ, you know going up and down. When I pray, does God accept that? Is God pleased with that? Let me ask you this, now think about it. Have I ever, in my life, prayed what I would categorize as a perfect sinless uncontaminated prayer? No distractions from anywhere, from the flesh, from the world? Have I ever done that? Well I'm going to tell you – I haven't. I remember before I was converted, I was sitting up there at 13 Street Baptist Church, brother Mahan was preaching and he made this statement - I thought it was crazy, in fact I didn't want to go back, I

didn't even want to go the first time, but my mother kept talking me into going back. That was the Lord using her to get my attention. He made this statement, he was talking about the sinner hood how we are such a sinful people, and he said, "there's enough sin in the best prayer I've ever prayed to sink a world to hell." I thought he was off his rocker. I didn't know what he meant, but then I came to understand by the power of God, through his word, what righteousness is. We call it holiness. You know somebody talks about holiness and righteousness and those are different terms. Usually when we speak of the word holiness we're talking about moral purity, but normally that's not what it means in the Bible. You know the writer of Hebrews called the people of God holy brethren. Does that mean that they were morally perfect in their thoughts, in their motives? No, that means they were set apart by God, set apart before the foundation of the world when God chose them, set apart in justification - God put them in Christ - their sins imputed to Christ, his righteousness to them. Set them apart in redemption - Christ died for our sins. Set us apart in regeneration when the Holy Spirit brought us under the gospel, gave us faith to believe, gave us a new heart, a new spirit, new mind. Brought us to faith in Christ and repentance. You see, that's different from what I was. He convicts us of sin and righteousness and he shows us what righteousness is. For the first time in my life (now, I'm not setting a date or time on it) but for the first time in my life I knew righteousness. I know what it is. I know the measure, I know the scale now. I know the standard and here it is - somebody says "Well, I'm going to do the best I can, that ought to be good enough." Well what does God say? Repent, because God has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, by whom? By that man whom he hath ordained in that he's given assurance unto all men and that he raised him from the dead. Okay, you do the best you can but it better measure up to the standard of righteousness and where's that to be found? In Christ. You say I'm just going to love everybody. Unless you can say that you love everybody as perfectly as Christ loved everybody you fall short. Isn't that right? You fall short.

You know, God requires perfect righteousness and a lot of people say well that's unreasonable of God to require that knowing that we can't measure up. It's not unreasonable because God provides a way of righteousness. But it's not a way we want by nature and the reason we don't want it by nature is because it doesn't give us any room to boast. It doesn't give me any room to glory. I mean you think about it. I was writing an article for a future bulletin on "why me Lord" - you remember that old song? Well a believer, often times, will ask that question, let's say - concerning election. Think about it. Look at the population of this world and the number of people that we believe who know, love and believe the true gospel and the number of people who don't. And we know that the only difference between us and them is what? The sovereign mercy and grace of God. Isn't that it? Can you think of any other reason? Somebody said, well the Jews they thought they were chosen too. Yeah, but they thought they were chosen based upon things that gave them room to boast. I don't have any room to boast. Why did God choose me? There's only one biblical answer given. It's found in Matthew chapter 11. When Christ said, "*that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight.*" Luke 10:21b He didn't say father THEY seemed good in your sight. It. His choice. God said "I'll have mercy on whom I'll have mercy." He told that to Moses. I'm going to talk about that a little bit this morning in the main message. But this is it. There's nothing in us. So how does he give us that hunger and that thirst? He convicts us of sin. He shows us that apart from Christ and his righteousness imputed we are eternally damned. The best of us and the worst of us and everybody in between.

Now there is a future aspect of this. Turn to Philippians chapter 3. Let me show you this. The true citizens of the kingdom of heaven are those who know righteousness, they know that God must be just when he justifies; they know they don't have it in themselves and can't work it and they are filled when they find it in Christ - his righteousness imputed. That's the true citizens of the kingdom of heaven and I'll tell you what - that is a filling isn't it? Now you think about it. If you know yourself, that is a filling. In other words, everything that God requires of me as to attaining and maintaining my salvation and eternal blessing I find complete in Christ. Colossians 2:9-10a *"For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. 10 And ye are complete in him,"* Hebrews 10:14 *"For by one offering he hath perfected (completed, finished) for ever them that are sanctified."* But now there is a future aspect of this the beatitude. Look at Philippians chapter 3. Paul was talking about how he can only find righteousness in Christ, but then in verse 11 he starts talking about the resurrection of the dead. See there in verse 11 of Philippians 3 - *"If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead."* What is the resurrection of the dead? Well, the most comprehensive explanation that we're given of resurrection from the dead is found in 1 Corinthians 15. We won't turn there, but you can read the whole chapter. When I wrote that book "What is Salvation?" that was the fourth realm of salvation - the glorified realm. When the apostle spoke of it, he spoke of salvation in the future tense. We are saved, we're being saved, we will be saved. When we talk about the glorified state, what we're talking about is being freed from the bondage of this physical being, this flesh, this sin and its contamination and getting a new body, a spiritual body. What I always tell people is when you read about that and study it, we've got a lot of questions about that. You'll still have a lot of questions about it. We know some things about it. We know from the Christ appearing to the disciples after his resurrection, we know something of that and his glorified body. But here's what he's talking about here - the resurrection of the dead is this: Remember Paul said in Romans chapter 7:24 *"O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"* In other words, I'm righteous in Christ right now - as righteous as I'll ever be. That cannot be improved. That's my ground of salvation, my ground of justification, that's the standard by which God measures everything. But right now, I'm still subject to the pains, the infirmities, in the weaknesses, and in the consequences of sin in this way. And sometimes it hurts a lot more than others doesn't it? If the Lord lets us live long enough it's going to get worse and worse, don't you know that? I know people who have been healthy all their lives and then all of a sudden boom- it hits. But usually it doesn't happen like that does it? Usually, for most of us, it's a gradual waning away. Walter, you're what, 86? He told me, he said I'm beginning to feel my age. I don't think I'm going to have to wait until I'm 86 to feel my age. You're blessed that way, Walter. Most of us don't have to wait till 86 to begin to feel our age, do we? What's the Lord showing us there? Paul the apostle says in Philippians 3:12 he says, *"Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect:"* What's he talking about there? He had already talked about being perfect in Christ, hadn't he? But now he's talking about in himself, I'm still just a sinner. We sing that song - "only a sinner saved by grace, only a sinner saved by grace, this is my story (that's my story!) to God be the glory, only a sinner saved by grace." That's what Paul's talking about, I'm perfect in Christ, I'm righteous in Christ as I'll ever be, but in myself I'm still a sinner. I'm still subject to all these problems, all these pains, and it gets worse as I get older, physically if nothing else. So Paul is saying *"Not as though I had already attained,"* What he's talking about is perfection in himself, sinlessness in himself. I haven't attained that yet. I'm still the old wretched man. And then he says, *"but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus."* What I am in

Christ, I'm going to follow after that. I want to be as perfect and conformed to Christ in every way

Philippians 3:13 *“Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, 14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”* Now to prove that he's talking about perfection in himself - he already has perfection in Christ, completeness in Christ, but not in himself. To prove that look at verse 15. *“Let us therefore, as many as be perfect (I'm perfect in Christ), be thus minded (think this way): and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.”* In other words, we who are already righteous in Christ, God gives us a hunger and thirst for righteousness in ourselves. In the sense, I'm not thinking that we can make ourselves so by our efforts. No, that would be a denial of Christ. But in the sense of wanting to be free from the consequences, the contamination, the influence of sin in ourselves. Now, let me caution you this way, that's not just a death wish. That's not simply saying, well I want to die now, because I've often said this I would kind of like to stick around a little while longer. I'd like to see my grandkids grow up, wouldn't you? I'd like to see them graduate from high school, even college, maybe get married. Some of y'all have great-grandkids. You might want to see them. But you know what, that may change. The Lord may hit me with some dreaded disease that I go through pain and I might wish to die, to go to be with him. Lord take me home. And I suspect, the older we get, the weaker we get that desire grow. I call it dying grace. Lord take me home. So what I'm saying here is we do hunger and thirst after righteousness. We want to be free from sin and ourselves. Well, that's going to be filled because Christ is going to take us home to be with him. Just like he told the thief, today you'll be with me in paradise. the were going to beat John said, *“Beloved,.....it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”* We will see him face-to-face. We will be with Christ. Like I said, there's a lot of questions that we ask about the glorification state in the body and the spiritual body. I don't know all the answers, but I know this - we'll live forever and ever with Christ - with no sin, no sorrow, no pain. That's not just a pipe dream. That's not just religious talk. That's reality – They shall be filled.