

THE BEATITUDES: Our King — His Kingdom — His Citizens

5. Blessed Are Those Who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness

Matthew 5:6

PREFACE — I believe that we should frame our study of each of these Beatitudes with this reminder: Jesus, the Savior and true forever King, has a Kingdom. He has an agenda; a government that reflects and expresses His character. He has policies — He has ways — He has values — that are **formed in** and **expressed through** the lives of the men and women who have embraced His rule. It is through the transformed lives of redeemed men and women that the ethos of the Kingdom of heaven invades the earth!

As we have unpacked the first three Beatitudes, we've observed that there is a **progression** and a **continuity** in the **formation** of these *attitudes* — the *character* — the *way of being* that mark His Kingdom and His citizens.

The second beatitude flows from and is built upon the first *way of being* Jesus called *poor in spirit*. The third beatitude — the *way of being* called meekness flows from and is built upon the first two.

John Stott — “Looking back, we can see that the first four beatitudes reveal a spiritual progression of relentless logic. Each step leads to the next and presupposes the one that has gone before. To begin with, we are to be ‘poor in spirit’, acknowledging our complete and utter spiritual bankruptcy before God. Next we are to ‘mourn’ over the cause of it, our sins, yes, and our sin too—the corruption of our fallen nature, and the reign of sin and death in the world. Thirdly, we are to be ‘meek’, humble and gentle towards others, allowing our spiritual poverty (admitted and bewailed) to condition our behaviour to them as well as to God. ”¹

Up to this point this progression through the first three beatitudes has followed the line of EMPTYING. After meekness we come to a transition. We go from being EMPTIED to being FILLED.

Before coming to Jesus, we had a hunger and thirst for temporal things, things that could not give life. We gluttoned ourselves with them, but they never satisfied!

¹ John Stott. “The Message of the Sermon on the Mount.”

But the grace and love and mercy and beauty of the Savior and King turns us upside down and inside — empties us of the stuff that kept us from real life. We not only receive the forgiveness of sins — we receive new life from Jesus — new life that produces a new appetite — a deep, innate *hunger and thirst*.

Matthew 5:6 (ESV) ⁶“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed — makarios — flourishing is the person who has *this new way of being* — **who hungers and thirsts for righteousness**. There are two big subjects in this beatitude: **1.** Hunger and Thirst and **2.** the object of this hunger and thirst — Righteousness.

HUNGER AND THIRST

Our King tells us that our flourishing is the outcome of having a hunger and thirst for a specific thing. Living in 21st century America it would be easy for us to misunderstand this longing. When we say we are hungry or thirsty we mean it’s been a couple of hours since we last ate — or we need to refill our water flask with filtered water. It’s hard for us to get our heads and hearts around the INTENSITY of desire that Jesus is getting at with the words “Hunger and thirst” because if we are thirsty all we need to do is turn on the tap or go to the refrigerator — or walk into a grocery store or convenience store for cold, refreshing water; or if we are hungry, we just open the refrigerator or head to the nearest drive through.

But that multitude of men and women listening to Jesus in **Matthew 5** felt the intensity Jesus was describing with the words “hunger and thirst” because they were never far from the possibility of dehydration or starvation. When they heard the words “hunger” and “thirst” they thought about desperate longing that must be met — or else!

The need for food and water has literally driven history. Whenever supplies of food and water is shut off people take drastic measures. In history people and societies literally relocated in order to eat and find water. When you drive through Israel you see mounds/elevated places all over the country. Archaeologists refer to those mounds with the word Tel (Tel Aviv / Tel Dan).

Those hills consist of the ruins of one city that was built on top of another because there was a source of water there.

Jesus made the words Hunger and Thirst even more intense — by saying that it was a continual hunger — a continual thirst.

Here's the deal — A starving person has a single all-consuming passion: Eat! A dehydrated person has a single all-consuming passion: Drink!

We NEED to listen to Jesus! Here is our King telling us that the blessed life — makarios — the flourishing life is tied to a deep and desperate, profound and persistent hunger and thirst.

Matthew 5:6 (ESV) ⁶“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness

Jesus said that the trademark of His Kingdom — the attitude and way of being that leads to flourishing is deep and desperate, profound and persistent hunger and thirst for righteousness. Righteousness is a necessity that they can't live without.

Think about this — where in the world do we find men and women saying — prescribing — or living as though the way to happiness and flourishing is to desperately long for righteousness?!!

QUESTION: WHAT is righteousness?

It would be a mistake to suppose that the Biblical word 'righteousness' only refers to a right relationship with God.

John Stott — *Righteousness in the Bible has at least three aspects: legal, moral and social.*²

LEGAL RIGHTEOUSNESS — is the right standing we have with God through faith in Jesus.

² John Stott. “The Message of the Sermon on the Mount.”

Romans 3:21–22 (NLT) ²¹*But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago.* ²²*We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are.*

Philippians 3:9 (NLT) ⁹*... I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith.*

Without this righteousness we would be forever lost. This righteousness — this right standing with God — is only possible because of the cross of Jesus!

2 Corinthians 5:21 (NET) ²¹*God made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we would become the righteousness of God.*

But this cannot be the righteousness Jesus is talking about here. Jesus is talking about those who are already in His Kingdom because they have been made right with God through faith in Jesus.

MORAL RIGHTEOUSNESS — is a righteousness of character that is expressed in righteous living — a life in conformity to the heart and ways of the King.

Jesus is talking about having a deep and desperate, profound and persistent desire to do God's will from the heart in every area of their life.

R. Kent Hughes — *"Indeed, it is too strong for some Christians. It rules out sleek, self-satisfied, halfhearted religion."*³

This is NOT legalism. Legalism = If I do this — God owes me this. This is a deep longing to be like our King — *Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous (1 John 2:1NLT)*.

SOCIAL RIGHTEOUSNESS — John Stott (The Message of the Sermon on the Mount) said:

³ R. Kent Hughes. "The Sermon on the Mount."

It would be a mistake to suppose, however, that the biblical word ‘righteousness’ means only a right relationship with God on the one hand and a moral righteousness of character and conduct — it includes social righteousness as well.

Jesus is talking about having a deep and desperate, profound and persistent desire *to see right done—to help bring about God’s will in the world.*⁴

I can guarantee you that there are those who will hear this and say that I’m preaching a “social justice Gospel.”

D.A. Carson is absolutely brilliant on this point —

*(The citizens of the Kingdom) hunger and thirst, not only that they may be righteous (i.e., that they may wholly do God’s will from the heart), but that justice may be done everywhere. All unrighteousness grieves them and makes them homesick for the new heaven and new earth—the home of righteousness (2 Pe 3:13). Satisfied with neither personal righteousness alone nor social justice alone, they cry for both. In short, they long for the advent of the messianic kingdom. What they taste now whets their appetites for more. Ultimately they will be satisfied.*⁵

I believe that much of 21st century church culture has under realized the intensity of *hunger and thirst* — and under realized the breadth of *righteousness*.

UNDER REALIZED the intensity of *hunger and thirst for righteousness*

Back to the preface — Jesus is Savior and King. He has an agenda; a government that reflects and expresses His character. He has policies — He has ways — He has values — that are **formed in** and **expressed through** the lives of the men and women who have embraced His rule. It is through the transformed lives of redeemed men and women that the ethos of the Kingdom of heaven invades the earth!

⁴ Barton, B. B. (1996). [Matthew](#) (p. 78). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

⁵ Carson, D. A. (2010). [Matthew](#). In T. Longman III & D. E. Garland (Eds.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew–Mark (Revised Edition)* (Vol. 9, p. 164). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Jesus said that one of the characteristics of those men and women is that they are starving — not for more stuff or more pleasure or more position and power — they are deeply, desperately, profoundly and persistently starving for righteousness.

QUOTE: John Darby — *“The righteousness only comes to the starving, not to the hungry.”*

There are tons of Christians who are just hungry enough to go to church (or in COVID world live stream church) for some music and a 30 minute talk.

Where are the people that are **starving** for LEGAL righteousness — starving to see lives made right with God? Where are the people that are **starving** for MORAL righteousness — starving for righteousness of character in their own lives expressed in righteous living — personally starving for their own lives to be in conformity to the heart and ways of the King.

If you and I have no longing for righteousness, we had better initiate a careful analysis of our souls.

UNDER REALIZED the breadth of righteousness

FIRST — Do I really understand the ways of Jesus?

There is no shortage of professing Christians who only think of righteousness in one dimension: Legal righteousness — being brought into a right relationship with God through faith in Jesus. But the minute righteousness is used in reference to character and behavior they think “legalism” and dead works. When people speak of wanting righteousness to prevail in our broken world there are professing Christians who accuse them of abandoning the true Gospel for a social Gospel. This is a massive failure to understand the nature and attributes of God.

Jeremiah 9:24 (ESV) but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, THAT I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.”

In **Psalm 97** we're told that the whole earth should rejoice and be glad because **the very foundations of His sovereign rule** are "righteousness and justice"!

In speaking of Jesus Isaiah tells us (**Isaiah 9:7**) that Jesus will establish and uphold His everlasting Kingdom *with justice and with righteousness*.

Because God is righteous and just — His **ways** are righteousness and justice.

Psalm 33:5 (ESV) *He loves righteousness and justice;*

That is why God desires His people to **do** righteousness and justice in the world.

Genesis 18:19 (ESV) ¹⁹*For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him."*

This is not some "Old Testament dead works." Abraham had already been justified by faith.

Psalm 106:3 (ESV) *Blessed are they who observe justice, who do righteousness at all times!*

We read in Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 22:3; 15-16 (ESV) ³*Thus says the LORD: Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place....* ¹⁵*Do you think you are a king because you compete in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him.* ¹⁶*He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not this to know me? declares the LORD.*

By the way — There are so many times in the Bible where we find the word *righteousness* (tzedeq) paired with the word *justice* (mishpat). We also find *righteousness* and *justice* (mishpat) coupled to two other words: *Steadfast love* (chesed) and *mercy/compassion* (racham).

Hosea 2:19 And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy.

This is the heart of the Lord — this is the way of the Lord. The heart and ways of the Lord are **formed in** and **expressed through** the lives of the men and women who embrace His rule. It is through the transformed lives of redeemed men and women that the ethos of the Kingdom of heaven invades the earth!

We should care about what our King cares about.

THAT is why Jesus told us that while the rest of the world is worrying about what to wear, and where to live, **we** are to *seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness (Matthew 6:33)*. This is not a social Gospel. This is not “woke” language. This is the WAY of our King! The church — you and me — are to be the living expression of our King and His ways.

Where are the people that are starving to see righteousness in the whole human community because our King delights in it?

Where are the people that are desperately praying — *Jesus, now that you are my legal righteousness, intensify my hunger for becoming a more righteous man, and someone who works tirelessly and hope-fully for justice in my community* — and they will not be satisfied with anything less or anything else.

HERE'S THE DEAL — arguing with our cultural opponents or our political opponents is not the same thing as hungering and thirsting for God's righteousness to break into the world.

One guy made the statement — *“We can't pick and choose the teachings of Christ we want to keep. Nor can we reduce Jesus to the poster child of our pet moralities or political persuasions. Rather, the collective weight of who our King is — what His ways are — what He values — His agenda should drive us to our King to find forgiveness and form His righteousness in us.*

PROBLEM — **Some people** want the kingdom without a king. **Some people** want the king without a kingdom.

Those who want the kingdom without a king want all the benefits without bowing the knee. To see that lived out with all of its horrible consequences, you need look no further than the beginning of the Book of Beginnings (Genesis) and look at Adam and Eve.

In the Book of Beginnings we're told that God created the heavens and the earth. He commanded the physical world into existence — God said... and there was — God said... and there was. Then we read

***Genesis 1:26–27 (ESV)** ²⁶Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.... ²⁷So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*

Mankind was created (male and female) to bear His image — be his representatives on the earth — to make visible the heart and the ways of the invisible God. They were given stewardship over God's creation (Gen. 1:26; 28; 2:15) and they were to do that in such a way that they would make visible the heart and the ways of God — make visible God's intent for creation and humanity — resulting in the glory of God

But they decided that they wanted all of that without the King — without the creator. They didn't want God to tell them what was right and wrong — good or bad. That didn't end well.

But there are also those who want the king without a kingdom. Guys — We are not creatures without a kingdom. We used to be in the kingdom of death and darkness and there was a course to that world — an ethos defined by the god of this world — Satan. Jesus saves us from that kingdom and places us in His Kingdom.

***Philippians 3:20 (ESV)** ²⁰But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,*

We cannot live detached from His concerns — we cannot live independent of His agenda — we cannot live without the responsibilities that go along with the immeasurable privilege of being citizens under His rule. We cannot live without

the responsibilities that go along with the immeasurable privilege of being citizens under His rule making the heart and ways of our King visible in this world — one heart at a time UNTIL He returns.

As citizens I pray that the words of Jesus will recalibrate our hearts. That His words will cause us to embrace Him and His rule! Will you join me in bringing our hearts before Him and ask Him to show us what we hunger for, what we thirst for?