September 13, 2015

“Blessed Are Those Who Hunger and Thirst”

Matthew 5:6

**FCF**: Low view of “the good”

**PROPOSITION**: (anchor) Jesus has made clear the way our lives should be.

(magnet) We should then heed and pursue this.

**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

I’ve noticed a funny thing in interviews with actors on the roles they play. It’s pretty common for folks to prefer playing the villain instead of the hero. To paraphrase, “*Being good is boring. Being bad can be so much more interesting*.” It’s like tasting without actually eating.

Which makes sense but it may point to a deeper problem we have. Often, when it comes to moral integrity, we hear some other words. “*Let’s not take this thing too far*.” That is, “*I’m all for doing the right thing. So long as it doesn’t become impractical or inconvenient*.”

Which raises a question. What if this impractical and inconvenient thing proves to be essential? What if we were made for it as we were made for oxygen? Would you tell a deep sea diver or astronaut, as they were packing their gear, “*Don’t take this breathing thing too far?*”

Deep within, we have a low view of the good, of the morally beautiful, of righteousness.

**SCRIPTURE READING**: Matthew 5:1-12

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

The reality of “cause-and-effect” is worth knowing. It helps in the physics lab, at the crime scene, and as we trace the patterns of our family histories. One thing does lead to another.

The same is true here in the Beatitudes. As John Stott points out (READ quote):

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. And fourthly we are to ‘hunger and thirst for righteousness’. For what is the use of confessing and lamenting our sin, of acknowledging the truth about ourselves to both God and men, if we leave it there? Confession of sin must lead to hunger for righteousness.

It’s the reality of “cause-and-effect”, one thing leading to another at the level of our hearts.

(READ Matthew 5:6) Jesus speaks of such people as being “blessed” – meaning, as we’ve seen through this series, not a description of mood or temperament but an assessment of a life, of character and experience. “*This is the type of person you should admire, envy, imitate, and emulate. If you are following Me, this is a picture of how your lives should be.*”

Jesus makes clear the way our lives should be – part of which means a hunger and thirst for righteousness. We should then heed and pursue this. But that raises a question. What would that mean? Breaking this down, we need to think through three things. First, who is Jesus speaking of? Second, why are they described this way? And, finally, how can this be true of us?

1. **WHO ARE THEY?**

(READ Matthew 5:6) Who is Jesus speaking of here? What is this hunger and thirst?

1. *Deep Longing*

Those physical sensations are meant to be symbolic of a deep inner longing of the heart.

1. Hunger

Think of what hunger meant to Jesus’ hearers. In the ancient world, this was a real and present danger. It’s what made the fertility gods so appealing. But Jesus declared (READ John 6:35).

1. Thirst

Then there is thirst. In an arid land with little rain, this could be a frightening prospect. It’s why any city had to work out the water supply issues. But Jesus declared (READ John 4:13-14).

1. *For Righteousness*

So here in the Beatitudes, Jesus is speaking to a deep longing. For what? Righteousness.

1. Not alien

Now, if you’ve read Paul’s writings, this sounds like justification, of an alien righteousness, of Christ’s righteousness imputed to the believer, securing our legal standing before the judge.

1. But moral and social

Which, of course, is true. That is certainly there. But that is not what Jesus is referring to here. Jesus is referring here not to an alien righteousness but to something else. Not that which has been done for us but that which we are actually doing. A moral righteousness – our character and conduct in conformity to God’s commands. A social righteousness – pursuing liberation of the oppressed, justice for the downtrodden, integrity in our workplaces, honor in the home.

This is not just mourning for sin but longing for righteousness. That’s what Jesus means.

*Illustration:*

And, as with all the Beatitudes, Jesus Himself is the best example of this. We’ve already seen this in Matthew’s Gospel back in the account of Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness (READ Matthew 4:1-4). Our deepest need is for God. All the rest is ultimately a symptom of that.

*Application:*

All of which is to say that what Jesus is describing here are people who are as desperate for righteousness, for truly walking with God, as any of us would be for food and water in a barren wilderness. Which is just the imagery we find in the Scriptures (READ Psalm 42:1).

This is who Jesus is speaking of. This is what it looks like to follow Him. Which is what is behind this soaring searching invitation (READ Isaiah 55:1-2). That is what is held out to us.

Jesus has made clear the way our lives should be. We should then heed and pursue this.

1. **WHY ARE THEY BLESSED?**

But why are such people described this way, as blessed? (READ Matthew 5:6)

1. *Promise of Satisfaction*

They are blessed for they shall be satisfied. Their emptiness filled, their thirst quenched.

1. Moral

In the moral sense, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will find their relationship with God to be less clouded by sin, by fretting and faithlessness, by distrust and disobedience.

1. Social

In the social sense, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will come to see all things new as far as the curse is found. Disease giving way to healing, emptiness to fullness, broken relationships to reconciliation, poverty to abundance, injustice to justice, racism to peace.

1. *Coming of Satisfaction*

They will be satisfied. But how and when will this promise come to pass?

1. Present

Partially, now. The kingdom has yet to come but has come, not yet in full but still in part. Think of the sanctification of the individual believer, our growth in grace, our becoming more like Jesus. This is the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5, the “beatitudinal life” here in Matthew 5.

1. Future

But there is, thank God, more coming when all things will not just be partially or substantially new but truly and thoroughly new. All for which our appetites have been whetted set before us. No more unrighteousness in any sphere to grieve our hearts. No more homesickness of the soul.

This is good news! And it is intended to encourage and excite us, to stir us up.

*Illustration:*

The problem is that, for us in the 21st century West, images of hunger and thirst fall flat. When we’re hungry, we’re used to going to the grocery store, a restaurant, or even having our meal delivered to our door. When we’re thirsty, we walk across the room and turn on the tap.

*Application:*

But imagine the greatest experience you’ve ever had of a deep satisfaction of your heart, a yearning met, a filling of your soul, a quenching of your thirst. It is the greatest experience you’ve ever had. Now understand that it is but a flicker of a glimpse of a reflection of what is coming. And, then to some degree, of what we can experience through Christ even now.

Our greatest hunger, our deepest thirst, shall be met in Him. And can be now. Not just in that full and final sense later but in a real and substantial way now (READ Matthew 5:6).

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1. **HOW CAN THIS BE TRUE OF US?**

That’s the “who” and the “why”. But what of the “how”? How can this be true of us?

1. *Questions to Ask*

We can begin by asking ourselves some questions – each having to do with our motives for doing good. Assume we’re trying to “*do unto others as we’d have them do unto us*”. Why?

1. To make ourselves look good

Is it to keep up appearances, to make ourselves look good? Then, ultimately, it’s all about us.

1. Because others told us to be good

Are we good because others told us to be good and we want them off our back? Again, selfish.

1. To make ourselves feel good

Why are we doing it? Is it because of the feeling of having contributed to something, the vibe of making a difference, the warm fuzzy of helping out? Again, then it’s all about us. It’s selfish.

I know that’s hard to hear. But there’s only one worthy motive – love of God and others.

1. *Practical Steps*

So we start with some hard questions. And then move from there to some practical steps. How do we develop this love-oriented hunger and thirst? Time-honored and proven ways.

1. Corporate worship

Corporate worship – regular assembling together with God’s people to praise His name.

1. Christian fellowship

Christian fellowship – gathering with other believers to share and experience life together.

1. Bible reading

Bible reading – daily time in the Word of God, letting it form our thoughts and shape our hearts.

1. Continual prayer

Continual prayer – constant communication with God, giving all our thanks and needs to Him.

These are time-honored and proven ways God has given to us to reshape and remake us. They are not magic. They are not mechanical. But they are means, means of grace in our lives.

*Illustration:*

Think of Bartimaeus, a blind man who came to Jesus in desperation for his sight. He could not make himself see. But he could go to the One who could (READ Mark 10:46-52).

We would do well to do the same – to throw off the cloak, spring up, and go to Jesus.

1. *Things to Know*

But behind the questions to ask and the steps to take, there are some things to know.

1. Alien righteousness

I mentioned alien righteousness earlier – that once-for-all way our justification, our legal standing, has been secured. We need to take hold of that as we strive to grow in righteousness.

1. Moral/social righteousness

For the reality is that we will stumble and fall in our attempts here. And we need to know that that doesn’t change our standing. That doesn’t change the Lord’s determination to transform us, to make us more like Himself. And the more we grasp that, the quicker we’ll get back up off the ground and the harder we’ll try the next time around. Why? We know we’re free. And loved.

**CONCLUSION:**

But you may be asking, “W*hat do I do when I feel like I’m nowhere near this?*” Talk to yourself. I know that sounds odd. But I’m sure you’ve had that experience in WalMart – seeing that person walking and talking to someone you can’t see. They don’t seem unstable. The dialogue sounds rational. But it’s one-sided. Then you see that Bluetooth device in their ear.

But here I really am talking about talking to yourself. Just as the psalmist does in Psalm 42 and 43. We read from that earlier in connection to the deer, the wilderness, and its panting thirst. But listen to this threefold refrain (READ Psalm 42:5). Sometimes the greatest sign of spiritual sanity is when we’re talking to ourselves, interrogating ourselves, drilling down deep.

That said, God is still part of that conversation. Because what we’re asking is, “*Lord, why am I not hungering and thirsting for righteousness? Why is my heartrate flat? Why is there so little longing within me? Why am I so easily satisfied with things in me and around me?*”

He will then take you on a journey. You’ll have to wrestle with that cause-and-effect. “*Why am I not hungering and thirsting? Because I’m not meek. Why am I not meek? Because I’m not mourning. Why am I not mourning? Because I don’t see my spiritual poverty*.” You’ll have to go back, trace the steps, cry out to Him with Bartimaeus, “*Let me recover my sight!*”

He’ll hear that prayer. And He’ll take your hardened heart and make it soft.

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