

Starving for Righteousness
Matthew 5:6; Proverbs 14:34
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Greg L. Price

Have you noticed how the discussion in the public arena always revolves around the word “justice” rather than “righteousness”, social justice not social righteousness? I have heard pastors in interviews say that they desire leaders to be “just” in their policies, but they neglect the need for leaders to be “righteous” before God and man (Proverbs 14:34)? Our society (and sadly the church) has no desire for righteousness or an inward, moral transformation of the soul of man when it comes to politics. All that seems to matter for social justice warriors is that “justice” or outward changes in policy and law be reached. What’s important is that institutions be changed, not sinful hearts.

But if there is to be any true justice in a nation it must be founded upon the just, unchangeable, Moral Law of God (as summarized in the Ten Commandments). Likewise, if there is to be any true righteousness in our relationships with God and our fellow man, it must be a righteousness that is found in God and His Moral Law. To replace God’s justice and righteousness with man’s justice and righteousness will always pervert true justice and corrupt true righteousness.

We should indeed hunger and thirst that true biblical justice be established and administered in the laws of our land, but unless we first hunger and thirst that biblical righteousness be graciously received from God and practiced in our lives, homes, and churches, there will be no biblical justice administered in our nation. Let us answer the following two questions from our text: (1) What Is It to Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness? (2) What Is Promised to Those Who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness?

I. What Is It to Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness?

A. Just as there is a First Table in God’s Law that reveals our duty to God (Commandments 1-4) and a Second Table that reveals our duty to our neighbor (Commandments 5-10), so likewise there is a First Table in the Beatitudes that reveals our duty to God (Beatitudes 1-4) and a Second Table that reveals our duty to our neighbor (Beatitudes 5-8). The Beatitudes tell us who we are in Christ by His grace, but also reveal to us how we are to live before God and our neighbor by His grace. No Christian perfectly lives out these Beatitudes, but every Christian has these Beatitudes implanted within and is growing in them. This is not a super saint; this is a Christian according to Jesus.

B. What does hungering and thirsting mean?

1. This hungering and thirsting does not mean that you are a little hungry so that your stomach is making strange noises or that you are a little thirsty.
2. This hungering and thirsting means you are famished (starving) for food, and you are parched and dehydrating and in great need of refreshing water. The same Greek word for hunger is used of Jesus in Matthew 4:1-2. Jesus had not eaten for 40 days. This is not a comfortable and manageable hunger and thirst, but one that is in desperate need of food and water. Jesus says the Christian is blessed when he/she has this insatiable spiritual hunger and thirst. When you are starving, you will not be satisfied with money, fame, sports, or politics. Only food will satisfy that hunger. So it is true when you are spiritually starving for Jesus and His righteousness. Nothing else will satisfy.
3. Jesus also says this hungering and thirsting is continuous (present participles) rather than a hungering and thirsting that you once had or that is very rare. This ongoing spiritual hungering and thirsting is to characterize your life as a Christian. Where that is not the case, it only reveals that you have a greater hungering and thirsting for the things in this world than you have for Jesus, His truth, and His

righteousness. The greater hunger overcomes the lesser hunger.

C. What is it for which you are to hunger? Righteousness!

1. The non-Christian has a hungering and thirsting for this world (riches, health, power, sex, fame, “social justice”, politics, education, success, and the favor of people), but not for Christ’s righteousness. Righteousness is not even in the vocabulary of the non-Christian. If only we as God’s people individually and collectively hungered and thirsted for Jesus and His righteousness as much as the devil and the world hunger and thirst for their pleasures. They eat, drink, and dream about their pleasures. That is what Jesus teaches in this Beatitude should be true of you and me—we should eat, drink, and dream about being righteous like our Savior.

2. What is righteousness? Righteousness is that which is “right” according to God and His holy commandments—not according to the world’s standards, but God’s. That is why the world hates righteousness and why you will never hear the word used by the world or corrupt, apostate churches.

a. A righteous man, woman, or child is one who is right before God, not on the basis of his/her own righteousness (Isaiah 64:6—poor in spirit); but who is right before God on the basis of Christ’s righteousness alone (Philippians 3:9; Titus 3:5-6). The eternal Son of God assumed human nature in order that He might fulfill all righteousness for those chosen in Him before the world began (through His perfect obedience to God’s Law for His elect and in His perfect suffering God’s holy wrath for His elect). This is what it means to be justified before God (Galatians 2:16—one of the essential truths of the gospel that was recovered by our Protestant reformers). This is a righteousness that is imputed/credited to you now and for all eternity when you trust in Jesus alone to save you. You are not only forgiven all your sins by God as Judge, but that heavenly bank account of yours is filled with all of the glorious righteousness of Jesus. That is why no one can bring even one lawful charge against God’s elect (Romans 8:33). This is justification.

b. A righteous man, woman, or child is also one who is right because he/she has God’s righteousness implanted within at regeneration—a righteousness which every Christian hungers and thirsts to see manifested in his/her desires, thoughts, decisions, speech, and conduct. This is the righteousness that is revealed in your earnestly seeking to obey God and His commandments in your sanctification even though your obedience and mine is tainted by our own sins, weaknesses, and failures to walk faithfully before God as we should. That is why you sincerely repent, confess, and seek God’s fatherly forgiveness (that is an evidence that you hunger and thirst for righteousness). These are the ones who are continually hungering and thirsting for God’s righteousness to grow in their thoughts, words, and deeds, to be in their homes, in the church, and in the nation. These are the ones who are continually hungering and thirsting that they might keep God’s commandments, and for God’s will to be done on earth as it is done in heaven.

D. What are some ways to know whether you are truly hungering and thirsting for God’s righteousness?

1. Those who hunger and thirst for God’s righteousness will sooner be without their bank account, their family, or their life than be without Jesus and His righteousness. All that the world has to offer will not satisfy this spiritual hungering and thirsting for Christ and His righteousness. Only Jesus (the Bread of Life) will satisfy this hunger. The hunger and thirst of the world will have you leaving the table empty and unsatisfied—it may seem to satisfy for a brief time, but it is vanity (so said Solomon, the wisest and richest of men). All that is in the world can be and will be lost at death, but not Jesus and His righteousness. When are you truly content and full as a Christian? Only when you are filled with Jesus; only when you are walking in loving obedience to His commands.

2. Those who hunger and thirst for God’s righteousness will seek it regardless of the struggles, personal weaknesses, or persecution they face. You will not quit just because being faithful to your vows to God or your marital promises to your spouse are difficult and hard or because family and friends

despise you. The devil and the world will not make it easy to pursue righteousness. You will be despised, called a fanatic, perhaps lose a promotion or a job because you cannot work on the Sabbath. Those who only pretend to hunger and thirst for righteousness will allow their hunger and thirst for “freedom” to do their own pleasure conquer all pretense to hunger and thirst for righteousness.

3. Those who hunger and thirst for God’s righteousness will desire above all to be with Christ and His people. Even in presenting the gospel to unbelievers, it is not the fellowship of the ungodly that you desire—that is reserved for Christ and His people. With whom do you hunger and thirst to spend your time? With worldly family and friends, stars in music, sports, finances, politics, and movies? Do you hunger and thirst to spend time with Jesus each day (in private and family worship) and each Sabbath (Psalm 42:1-2)? Do you hunger and thirst to be with those who will challenge you to greater heights of righteousness?

4. Those who hunger and thirst for God’s righteousness will fill their minds daily with the truth and righteousness found in Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16-17). They will feed upon it as their favorite food. They will meditate upon it. They will memorize it. If you do not hunger and thirst for Jesus and His righteousness in His Word, you will not be filled.

5. Those who hunger and thirst for God’s righteousness will show their concern and sorrow when that strong desire for Jesus, His truth, and His righteousness is waning or fading away. They will cry out to Jesus to come near. They are not content to be lukewarm or neutral—they will repent and pursue the Lord Jesus and His righteousness.

6. Those who hunger and thirst for God’s righteousness will practice His truth and righteousness and not merely desire it. Where there are clear inconsistencies between holy desires and sinful practices, they will take that seriously, cry out for God’s mercy, lean upon His promises that they are dead to sin and alive to righteousness, and look in faith to God’s Spirit to fill them and control them.

II. What Is Promised to Those Who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness?

A. You are promised that you will be filled and satisfied with Christ’s righteousness. That is a promise from your God and Savior who cannot lie. God will not have you hunger and thirst in vain (Isaiah 45:19). Just as Jesus had compassion upon and delighted to feed the hungry bodies of the 5,000 rather than send them away empty, so He delights to fill the hungry soul with His righteousness. He will not send that hungry soul away empty. Sanctification in righteousness may not come as quickly as you want, beeping and thirsting and you will be filled, for it is He who places that hungering and thirsting within you in the first place (Philippians 2:13).

B. But you say, “I have hungered and thirsted for so long, and I am not yet filled.” Dear ones, you will not be filled completely until you are filled at that heavenly feast where you will hunger no more. Those faithful witnesses for Jesus Christ who continually hunger and thirst here upon earth for Christ and His righteousness to be revealed in their lives, their marriages, their church, and their nation will hunger no more in heaven (Revelation 7:16-17). Though your hungering and thirsting for Christ and His righteousness here upon the earth temporarily satisfies you and causes you to yearn for more and more of His righteousness, it is only in heaven that you will hunger and thirst no more. You will be full and overflowing with Christ and His righteousness only in heaven. That is what will make heaven, heaven.

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