

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

Hungering and Thirsting for Righteousness

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Matthew 5:6

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I want to take, as my text here this morning, one of the Beatitudes delivered by the Lord Jesus Christ the very outset of His famous sermon, the Sermon on the Mount. And I want to take, in particular, the fourth Beatitude found in Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 5, and the sixth, that's the sixth verse of the fifth chapter of Matthew's Gospel, where the fourth Beatitudes reads in this way:

Matthew 5:6 ~ Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

Now, it is very important to understand, each one of us, that what our Lord is giving us here in the Beatitudes is the marks of the citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. He is not telling us how to enter that Kingdom, He does that elsewhere, He says, "Ye must be born again, otherwise you cannot see, let alone enter, the Kingdom of Heaven." What He is giving us here, basically, is the marks, or the traits, or the characteristics of those that belong to the Kingdom of Heaven. Or to put it differently, the marks, the traits, the characteristics of those that are subjects of the King of kings, subjects of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

I emphasize that our Lord is not giving us here the method of entering into the Kingdom of Heaven for this reason, that you may know, some of you, that dispensationalism has a rather bizarre interpretation of the Beatitudes. Indeed, a rather bizarre interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount. Dispensationalism very often relegates the Sermon on the Mount to the Kingdom age. In other words, it says basically, and you can find this in the Scofield Bible, it says basically that this is not so much for the present age, the church age, as for a future age, the Kingdom age, the age of the millennium. Quite apart from the fact that I do not believe the Bible teaches a literal, physical millennium, I think that it is quite wrong to relegate this passage to that particular era. No, this is for us here and now. Our Lord is describing here the marks, and the traits, and the characteristics of those who belong to the Kingdom of God.

What are those marks then? What are those traits? Well, our Lord tells us here in the Beatitudes. They are as follows: He tells us the man who belongs to the Kingdom of Heaven, the man that is a Christian, the man that is regenerate will be

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poor in spirit, ***Blessed are the poor in spirit:...*** That means this: The word in the original denotes the idea of a beggar. A beggar that comes with nothing in his hands, a beggar that simply casts himself upon the mercy of others. And that is what beggars do. They do not own anything, they do not possess anything, they come empty-handed, and the Christian is like a beggar in the sight of God. *Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling. ***Blessed are the poor in spirit:...**** says the Lord Jesus Christ. He is like a beggar in spiritual terms.

Not only that, but he mourns. He mourns over his sin. ***Blessed are they that mourn:...*** says the Savior. And that mourning, that grieving, is not so much of the loss of a loved one, it is more a mourning and a grieving over sin, over needs, a sense of sin, a sense of God, a sense of need. That is the characteristic here so that the Christian man is one that is poor in spirit, he feels himself to be like a beggar, and he mourns and grieves over his sin. I do not mean continually, but at the very inception of Christian life, he must mourn and grieve over his sin. And then periodically, of course, as he becomes conscious of sin that dwells within him, so too he will mourn and grieve before coming to Christ for comfort.

The Christian man is not only poor in spirit, he not only mourns over his sin, he is also meek before God and men. ***Blessed are the meek:...*** And what our Lord has in mind here is a certain gentleness, a certain humility, a certain mildness. We have the phrase, don't we, in the English language, '*meek and mild*'? And the word '*mild*' casts an interesting light upon the word '*meek*'. Meekness is not weakness, it goes hand-in-hand with great strength. Think of the martyrs that died for the Lord Jesus Christ. Think of Bishop Latimer and Bishop Ridley, who in 1555, in the reign of Bloody Queen Mary, the daughter of Henry the VIII, they were put to death, they were burnt at the stake there in Oxford, in that particular year. Why? Because of their faith, because of their righteousness, and because of their insistence upon the protestant way.

So then we have here the marks, and the traits of the Kingdom of Heaven, and we come today to this fourth mark, this fourth trait. ***Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness:...*** I remind you then that we are dealing here with the regenerate person, the Christian man, one that is born again, and these are the traits, these are the marks, these are the signs of the Christian man. They are, therefore, tests. We can test ourselves whether we have these things, and ask God, "Do I possess these traits?" examining oneself in the sight of God. "Am I poor in spirit? Do I see myself as a beggar in the sight of God by nature? Do I mourn over my sin? Am I meek before God and men? And do I hunger and thirst after

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righteousness?” They are, I say, both signs, and also tests therefore by which we can examine ourselves.

Now there can be no doubt that the crucial word here in this fourth Beatitude, there in Verse 6, ***Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.*** There could be no doubt that the crucial word here is the word ‘righteousness’. What do we mean by righteousness? What does our Lord mean by righteousness? It tis a word that is synonymous, I think, more or less, with ‘holiness’, with ‘godliness’, with that Christian character that our Lord is seeking to define here. And there could be no doubt that the term ‘righteousness’, and the theme of righteousness, constitutes the major term, and the major theme of this great Sermon on the Mount. Let me demonstrate that. We have it here in this sixth verse, ***Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness:...*** But then you’ll notice in Verse 10, our Lord says this:

Matthew 5:10 ~ Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

And then again in Verse 20:

Matthew 5:20 ~ 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.

And then, of course, in Chapter 6 and Verse 33, we read this:

Matthew 6:33 ~ But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

It is evident then, from these verses, scattered throughout the sermon, that the theme of righteousness, the theme of godliness, the theme of holiness, is a crucial, pivotal theme in this great Sermon on the Mount. What exactly then is this righteousness? What does our Lord mean by it? Let’s be more specific. Well it means ‘conformity to the law of God’. Man, by nature, does not love God. Man, by nature, does not like God. Man, by nature, does not want God. Man, by nature, loves the darkness and hates the light. Man, by nature, will not come to the light lest his deeds be reproved. He doesn’t want this righteousness, he doesn’t want this conformity. He likes his non-conformity. He loves unrighteousness, basically. He loves the darkness. He loves his sin and will not come to the light, the one who is

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the light of the world, the Lord Jesus Christ. But our Lord says here, ***Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness:...*** No, we don't have it by nature. We do not possess by nature that desire even to be conformed to the will of God. That is the work of the Spirit of God within us.

As God shows us our poverty, as we mourn over our sin, as He develops that meekness of heart within us, so we hunger and thirst after righteousness. This is a mark of the Christian man, the Christian woman, the Christian young person. We could put it this way, that righteousness is the opposite of sin, it is the exact opposite of sin. The word of God puts it this way: All unrighteousness is sin. So that righteousness on the one hand, and sin on the other, they are opposites, they are antitheses, they stand in opposition to each other. Righteousness is the exact opposite of sin. But our Lord is telling us here that the Christian man is one that does not want sin, does not love sin, hungers and thirsts after righteousness. Yes, he will fall into sin, each one of us is marked by indwelling sin, and we fall into sin, but we do not love sin. We don't love the darkness. We love the light and we come to the light, to the Lord Jesus Christ. The Shorter Catechism puts it this way: *Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of the law of God.* So that sin can be defined in terms of the law of God. Breaking that law, breaking the Ten Commandments, flouting that law, that is what sin is. It is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of the law of God.

I want to emphasize here this morning, that this lack of conformity to the law of God, this want of conformity to the law of God, is the mark of each and every one of us by nature. The word of God says this: There is none righteous, no not one. There is none that doeth good, no not one. For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. That is opposition by nature, good friends, this lack, this want of conformity, is true of all men everywhere, it is true of us by nature. But by God's grace, a wonderful change has occurred in the hearts and lives of those who come to Christ. They have been born again, they have become new creatures, old things have passed away, behold all things become new. They are moving in a different direction, there is a new orientation, they have a new heart. They love righteousness, they love the light. They no longer love the darkness and hate the light. They love the light and they hate the darkness, even though they are conscious of frailty, and fallibility, and falling into sin here and there.

Now there are two aspects of this righteousness that I want to emphasize here today. Notice what our text says, ***Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness:...*** Two very important aspects, one might even call them

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theological aspects, but I want to explain carefully these terms. The first is that of *'imputed righteousness'*.

1) Imputed Righteousness:

Now the word of God speaks of imputed righteousness when it speaks of the Christian man, a Christian person, as being justified by faith. We're dealing here then with the great Doctrine of Justification, that doctrine that Martin Luther rediscovered through his study of the word of God. Rediscovered on the anvil of study, and on the anvil of suffering. The imputed righteousness of Christ, this alien righteousness that comes to us from without, and is given to the Christian. We're dealing here, I say, with the Doctrine of Justification, which teaches us that God justifies the ungodly.

Now that is a very wonderful thing. God is able to take an ungodly man, an ungodly woman, an ungodly young person, an ungodly child, and is able, on the basis of the work of Jesus Christ for us on the cross, dying for us, and is able to take that person and justify that person. That is to say, is able to declare that person righteous, even though he or she is unrighteous. "How does this work?" you say. It works like this: Christ bore our sins in His own body on the tree. Our sins are imputed to Christ, but this is the other aspect of that wonderful transaction. It is this: That just as the sins of the believer are imputed to Christ, so the righteousness of Christ is imputed to the believer. That is what I mean by the imputed righteousness. The righteousness of our Lord, His holiness, His perfection, is imputed, is reckoned to, and is put down to the account of the one that is a believer in Christ. It is the Doctrine of Justification. The doctrine that Martin Luther described as the article of the standing, or the falling of the church. Good friends, let me ask you, do you have a good grasp of this doctrine?

It has been described as the Doctrine of Mental Health. There is much to be said for that description. It is very, very important for our understanding as Christians to understand this great doctrine. That what God has done is this: He hasn't simply forgiven us, wonderful though that is, He has actually declared us righteous, which goes one step further if you like. And He declares us righteous on the basis of the wonderful work of Christ, our sins being imputed to Christ, His righteousness being imputed to the believer.

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Now this word *'impute'* may be a word that you are not familiar with, but it may occur in a conversation such as this. Two men are discussing something. The discussion soon becomes heated. The discussion soon develops into an argument and before long one of the men that is arguing says this to the other: "Now you are imputing to me something that I don't believe. You are imputing to me something that I don't think. In other words, you are crediting to me, you are putting down to my account something that doesn't really belong to me." That is the idea exactly. It is the idea of God giving us something that does not by nature belong to us. He imputes it, He reckons it, He credits it to our account. God imputes righteousness says the word of God, and this lies at the very epicenter of the Gospel, it lies at the epicenter of the great Doctrine of Justification. God imputes righteousness without works. In other words, independently of what we've done. It is by faith that this imputation occurs.

Now this imputation, this crediting, or reckoning of righteousness to the account of the believer, and this is true of every single believer under the sun, this is an act of God. It is not a process, it is not something that is being continued day after day. It happens at a single moment in time, God imputes righteousness to the believer. And the context here is forensic, by which I mean it is legal, we're in the atmosphere of the law court, we're standing as it were before the judge of all the earth. How would you and I have to plead by nature before the judge of all the earth? Is it not the case that you and I, by nature, inevitably would have to plead *'guilty'* before the judge of all the earth? As we consider our hearts, if we know the plague of our own hearts, if we examine our lives, if we think of our thoughts, if we examine our lips, if we think of our actions, we know that we have broken God's commandments, and therefore the only plea that we can render by nature before the living God is this: Guilty! Guilty before God! Ah yes, but this God is a God that justifies guilty men. He justifies guilty men that believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and when a guilty man repents and believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, the righteousness of that Christ, the righteousness of this Savior is imputed, is reckoned to the account of that believer.

Listen to this, listen to the way in which the apostle Paul describes it. He refers to David, he said, "David describeth the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works." Notice that God imputes righteousness without works, and it is a blessed thing, is a blessed state. You see, David was a sinner. David sinned with a high hand. He committed adultery, he broke the seventh commandment. He committed murder, he broke the sixth commandment. He lived a life of deceit for many months before he was found out, and he was

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therefore guilty before God. But David, notice, David describes the blessedness of the man under whom God imputes righteousness without works. That is the wonder of it, that God is able to take a man such as David, who frankly, for a few months, lived in the gutters of this life, is able to take such a man. And on the basis of the work of David's greatest son, who was to be born a thousand years later approximately, on the basis of the work of David's greater son, the son of David, the Lord Jesus Christ, David is able to describe the blessedness of a man unto whom God does not impute sin, unto whom God imputes righteousness with works. This righteousness then is a gift. It is a gift of God. It comes from God, it is given by God, it is given to the sinner that believes, and is put down to his or her account.

Now this righteousness of which we speak, this imputed righteousness is not a man righteousness. It is not an acquired righteousness. It is not an inherent righteousness. It is not intrinsic to us. We don't possess it by nature. It is a God righteousness, not a man righteousness, a divine righteousness, one that is imputed to the believer through faith. It is, as Professor John Murray puts it, a God righteousness, it is a faith righteousness, it is inextricably connected to faith. Faith, not simply in anything, faith not in faith itself, faith in Christ. He is the great object, and He is the great center of our faith, and every true believer possesses this imputed righteousness.

Good friends, I ask you, "Are you a believer here this morning? Have you believed in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior? Do you know Him as your Savior and your Lord? Have you believed upon His name? Have you ever repented of your sins? Have you turned from them? Have you turned to Christ? Have you laid hold of Him? Have you believed upon Him? If so, then you have this righteousness. You might not have realized that you had it. You might have been thinking primarily in terms of forgiveness, and that is fine. The word of God speaks of forgiveness many, many times, and forgiveness is a great blessing, but there is a sense in which justification goes beyond forgiveness, in this sense that the righteousness of Christ is actually put down to the account of every true believer. Do you realize that? Have you realized this? That as a believer you enjoy the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is put down to your spiritual account. Your sins have gone to Christ, His righteousness comes to you.

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2) Imparted Righteousness:

So that is the first part, the first element of this righteousness of which the Lord Jesus Christ speaks. But the second part, the second element is this: *'imparted righteousness'*. I've just dealt with imputed righteousness, and that is, in a sense, a forensic thing, a legal thing. It is put down to our spiritual account even though it is not ours by nature, it is put there by God, and credited to us. But now we come to the second element, imparted righteousness, which deals much more with the Doctrine of Sanctification. With imputed righteousness, we are looking at the Doctrine of Justification. With imparted righteousness, we are looking at the Doctrine of Sanctification, being made holy in a practical, and real way. The Doctrine of Sanctification.

Now this too is a very important doctrine, though it is different from the Doctrine of Justification. Justification comes first, sanctification comes second, but follows immediately upon the heels. The process of sanctification, that is, begins at the very moment of our believing upon the Savior. Let me put it this way, if you are a Christian, then when you became a Christian, when you believed upon the Lord Jesus Christ, Christ's righteousness was imputed to your account. That does not admit of degrees, it is not a process, it is not progressive, it happened once and for all, and forever. The righteousness of Christ was put down to your account. That is a wonderful, wonderful truth, the imputed righteousness of Christ. But also at that moment, a certain process began. There is something progressive about this. It goes on, and on, and on. There is this element of more and more. God sanctifies us increasingly. He makes us more holy practically. Do you see the difference? The imputed righteousness of Christ on the one hand, which is crucial, pivotal, and foundational, but then the imparted righteousness, God imparts righteousness to us.

Now there is certainly an ebb and a flow in this. We make progress, and then there is regress. We make progress, then we fall into sin. Nevertheless, the process of sanctification is occurring, and it occurs mainly as we read the word of God, as we hear the word of God, and as the Spirit of God takes the word of God and sanctifies us, and edifies us through it, making us more holy like the Savior Himself. So the word of God teaches us that God imparts this righteousness increasingly, and progressively, it is a process, and it happens, it starts as soon as we believe upon the Savior. So we are dealing here with something actual. That's to say, with real holiness. Good friends, do you have a concern to be holy? The word of God says, "Be ye holy, for I am holy," saith the Lord. A great reason why you and I are to be holy is precisely because we serve and know a holy God. He

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wants us to be made like Him. We're not holy by nature. We're unholy by nature. We're ungodly by nature, but God has saved us through Christ, and He begins this process of sanctification, this imparting of righteousness, by changing us. He changes us from one degree of glory into another. We're dealing here then with actual righteousness, actual holiness.

Notice the way in which the apostle Peter puts it. He says, "But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." And that should be our aim, if you're a Christian, to grow in grace, to grow in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, to increase and abound in holiness, to become more like the Savior. This is what is meant by this imparted righteousness.

Now, we're not dealing here with perfectionism. The word of God does not teach perfectionism. The word of God does not teach that any of us become perfect in this life. If we know ourselves and know our own hearts, and we know them well, surely we realize that that is not true and never will be true on this earth. But there is nevertheless this steady increase. There should be this steady increase in growth, and in grace, and in knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. So then this righteousness, this imparted righteousness, is a fruit, a fruit that grows, and grows as we dwell in Christ, and grows as we read His word, and as the Spirit of God takes it and applies it to us.

Now, this righteousness must be manifest in our lives. Have you ever noticed the word of God says this? It speaks of holiness *without which no man shall see the Lord*. Good friends, that is a sobering text. Let me put it this way. Without holiness, none of us shall see God. Holiness is demanded of us as Christians. We cannot simply come to Christ and live as we like. We cannot simply come to Christ and live as we please. We cannot simply come to Christ and live in sin. If we come to Christ, then we repent of our sins. We turn away from them. We turn from the darkness to the light. We put our trust in Christ, and we seek to follow Him down the narrow way that leads unto life. Good friends, are you doing that? Are you conscious that you're on that narrow way? The Christian way is a narrow way. It's not the broad road that leads to destruction. The world's on that road, but the Christian walks upon the narrow way. There's a narrowness about the way.

As Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones once put it, "There's a narrowness in God, in a sense." He has His laws. He has His boundaries. He says, "Thou shalt not cross. Thou shalt not transgress. Thou shalt not trespass." And so you see, the Christian then is someone that is following Christ, walking down the narrow way that leads unto

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life. I ask you this morning, are you doing that? Are you on that narrow way? Every true Christian is on the narrow way. He's shunned the broad road that leads to destruction. He's on the narrow way that leads unto life. Good friends, are you on that way? And are you following the Savior down that road? Because that is the position of the Christian.

My question then is this: Do you understand these two crucial aspects of righteousness? Firstly, the imputed righteousness of Christ, which coheres with our justification, and then the imparted righteousness of Christ, which coheres with our sanctification—do you realize that as a Christian you've been justified freely by the grace of God? Do you realize that as a Christian you are to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ, and increase and abound in Christian fruits and graces? That is the balance of the Christian life. Good friends, do you possess both of those? Not only the imputed righteousness of Christ, but also this imparted righteousness of Christ, and are you concerned to possess them? Are you concerned to understand these things? Are you concerned to make sure that you do indeed have this bedrock foundation, the imputed righteousness of Christ? But also this imparted righteousness of Christ, which is actual practical holiness day by day in our living. And have you learned to view yourself—I think this is very helpful—have you learned to view yourself in terms of both of these?

Let me put it this way. Let us suppose that a given Christian, a sincere Christian, one day falls into some grievous sin. What does that mean? Does it mean that that Christian person has lost his or her salvation? It does not mean that, no. It's rather like someone climbing up a mountain. They're climbing up the mountain. They're concerned to reach the top, the summit, but they trip over, and they fall. They don't fall down to the bottom. No, they just fall down, and they have to pick themselves up, dust themselves off, and continue climbing. There's a sense in which that pictures the Christian life. We don't lose our justification. We may have had a hiccup, as it were, in our sanctification, a major one perhaps, but nevertheless, we don't lose our salvation. We don't lose the forgiveness of sins, and we don't lose that justification. It's by faith alone through the imputed righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. So it's important that you and I should learn to look at ourselves in these two ways, both in terms of justification and sanctification, both in terms of the imputed righteousness of Christ and in terms of the imparted righteousness of Christ.

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Now, this means then that by definition, the Christian is someone that hungers and thirsts after righteousness. The Christian, by definition, has an appetite for these things. Good friends, let me ask you, do you have an appetite for righteousness, for godliness, for holiness, for Christ-likeness, for Christian virtue, and Christian virtues, these fruits, these graces of the Spirit of God in your life? It's very interesting that the Lord Jesus Christ should use terms here, hungering and thirsting, which relate to the physical realm. You know, it strikes me sometimes that man is a very demanding creature, isn't he? Put it this way. Think of the food that we need. I've lived 64 years, by God's grace, and God has fed me, obviously, through those 64 years, and God has fed you through your 64 years, or whatever your age is, maybe more, maybe less. But He takes care of us, you see, and gives us the food that we need. We hunger and we thirst. Man is a demanding creature, but God is a gracious God, and He provides those things that we need.

Now, when it comes to the spiritual realm, man also has these needs and these appetites. The problem in the spiritual realm is this. The tragedy in the spiritual realm is that man is very careless with these things. Let me put it this way. If a man goes without food or drink for a day, he will soon know it and so will everybody else. But if a man neglects his soul for a day, he probably couldn't care less, and perhaps nobody else might know it either. Man is very, very demanding when it comes to physical things. Man is very careless and even apathetic when it comes to spiritual things, but the Lord Jesus Christ here is using things that relate to the physical realm, but applying them to the spiritual—hungering and thirsting. Hungering and thirsting after what? Food and drink? No, "Hungering and thirsting after righteousness," says the Savior. So in other words, there is this need, this sense of need, and this profound sense of need which should be there. Good friends, do we have that? Do we desire to be more like the Lord Jesus Christ? Do we desire the word of God, to hide it in our hearts, and to shun sin, and to become more holy, and to be more like our Savior?

Now, there's an interesting connection here between this fourth Beatitude, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness," and the first and the second Beatitudes, which say, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," and, "Blessed are they that mourn." The connection is this, that it's precisely because the Christian man is poor in spirit, seeing himself like a beggar, recognizing his need, mourning and grieving over his sin, it's because he has this sense of God, it's because he has this sense of need, that he has this appetite for righteousness which only God can meet. The world cannot meet it. The greatest man under the sun

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cannot meet it, but Christ can meet it, this hungering and this thirsting after righteousness.

Let me put it this way. And this emerges, I think, as we look at these various Beatitudes. Initially in the Beatitudes, we are driven into ourselves in this sense that we have to examine ourselves. “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” says the Savior. “Blessed is the man that thinks, that realizes, that he is like a beggar in the sight of God. Yes, and blessed is the man that mourns and grieves over his sin.” We’re driven into ourselves, but when we come to this fourth Beatitude, we realize that we’re also driven out of ourselves. We are poor in spirit. We mourn over our sin, that we have this sense of need, this sense of sin, this sense of God, and we’re driven out of ourselves unto God, to the only One that can meet that need, namely the Lord Jesus Christ. Driven into ourselves, driven out of ourselves, that’s the movement here in these first four Beatitudes.

In other words, the Christian, and we can test ourselves by this, the Christian is someone that has a profound sense of need, has a sense of sin, has a sense of God, has a profound sense of need. Now, he’s not paralyzed by that sense of need. There’s something wrong if he is. No, he does something about it. He goes to Christ who alone can meet that need. Listen to what Christian says. “I am the bread of life.” What a wonderful claim. “I am the bread of life. He that cometh to Me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst.” Driven into ourselves, driven out of ourselves, driven unto God, driven to the cross, driven to the Savior’s side, this very sense of need drives him to Christ.

Good friends, is that true of you? Have you been driven to Christ? Are you truly a Christian? Are you truly born again? Have you truly repented? Have you truly believed in the Lord Jesus Christ? You see, being a Christian is, as I’m sure you know, it’s not simply a matter of coming to church. We need to come to church and not forsake the gathering of ourselves together. That’s very important, but merely coming to church, merely being a church-goer does not make us Christian men or women. Merely being good does not make us Christian men or women. Being a moral man does not make a man a Christian man. We can be decent, moral, respectable, upright, and unconverted. It’s when we come to Christ that we are saved, driven into ourselves, driven out of ourselves, hungering and thirsting after the Savior, and the righteousness that He imputes and that He imparts. This very sense of need drives us to Christ.

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Good friends, have you so been driven? Have you gone to the Savior? Do you go to the Savior? Do you recognize that He and He alone can meet your needs and mine? Now, this hungering and thirsting, though, does not cease at conversion. It's manifest at conversion. There's this hungering and this thirsting after the imputed righteousness of Christ without which we cannot stand before God. David describes the blessedness of such a man a sinner, a gross sinner, murder, adultery, lying, but David describes the blessedness of the man to whom God does not impute sin, to whom God does impute righteousness, and does so through the work of David's greatest Son who was also born in Bethlehem one thousand years later or so. Listen to the Psalmist David himself.

Psalm 42:1-2 ~ As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. 2 My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God:

Good friends, do you know anything of this? Do you know anything of the sense that you've not been in the word lately, and you need to get back into that word? That somehow you're parched? That somehow you're starved? You haven't read it. You haven't fed yourself upon it, and you need to, to go back to this word, by the washing of water of the word. You see, this is one of the marks of the regenerate. Our Lord says here, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness." The man of the world does not know this. He hungers and thirsts after pleasure. He hungers and thirsts after money. He hungers and thirsts after power and after fame, but the one thing he doesn't hunger and thirst after is righteousness. He couldn't care less about it. He's unrighteous, but he thinks he's righteous. He's unrighteous to the core. He's a sinner. There's none righteous, no, not one. But he couldn't care less about the righteousness of God, this imputed righteousness, but what about you? Do you care about it? Are you seeking it, this imputed righteousness, this imparted righteousness, both of which come from the Lord Jesus Christ? This, I say, is one of the marks of the regenerate man.

Listen to the Saintly Robert Murray M'Cheyne of the Free Church of Scotland back in the 1840's roughly. This is what his prayer was: "Lord, make me as holy as a poor guilty sinner can be made." He realized he was a sinner. He needed the Savior, but he was concerned for holiness, and godliness, and practical righteousness. "Lord, make me as holy as a poor guilty sinner can be made." Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, says the word of God.

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Now, the man that truly hungers and thirsts after righteousness will also be a man that hungers and thirsts after the word of God. Good friends, let me ask you this. Do you read your Bible? Do you read it day by day? You don't neglect your physical needs. You feed your body. You'd be hungry, and starving, and very thirsty, and in desperate need before long if you didn't do that, but what about your spiritual needs? What about your spiritual appetite of which the Savior clearly speaks here? "Man shall not live by bread alone," says the Savior. He does live by bread, but he's not to live by bread alone, "...but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Good friends, do you live by that? Do you feed your souls upon this word of God that proceeds out of the mouth of God. You see, the word of God is like bread, and the wonderful thing about bread is this. We never grow tired of it, do we? It's not like a piece of rich cake, very nice at the time, but if we had that all the time, we'd soon be fed up with it. No, bread, and the word of God is like bread. The bread of God, the bread of life, indeed the word of God is likened to many different things. It's likened to bread. It's likened to milk. It's likened to honey. It's likened to strong meat, which again demonstrates the wonderful ways the word of God is wonderfully fitted and suited for our needs.

Good friends, do you have a hunger for the word of God? Do you read the word of God day by day? It is so easy—I know myself—so easy with the busyness of life to neglect the very thing upon which we are to feed our souls, to neglect that in ourselves, to neglect it in our families, but we must not do that. Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God, the means of grace, the word of God. "Blessed are they," says the Savior, "which do hunger and thirst after righteousness."

Now, we see here a very important connection, the connection between holiness and happiness. Isn't this man's great concern, just to be happy? The problem with men, though is this, that they want to be happy without being holy, when God has in fact so connected these things together that man can only be truly happy when he's holy. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness. They are objectively blessed, says the Lord, and subjectively they will be blessed. They will be happy if so be that they trust in Christ and follow after Him, and seek not only this imputed, but also this imparted righteousness of which I speak. The tragedy of man, I say, is this, that he wants this happiness apart from holiness, but cannot have it. Listen to what the Savior says.

John 6:35 ~ I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.

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Now, at first glance, you might think, “Well, that sounds like a contradiction of our text.” The text says, “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness,” but the Savior also says, “I am the bread of life; he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.” Well, there may be an apparent contradiction but no real contradiction. The hunger that we have, the thirst that we have, is met by Christ by the One who is the bread of life. He meets our needs, and He alone can meet those needs. Hungering and thirsting, never hungering and never thirsting, that’s the paradox. Christ Himself is the One that solves the paradox.

Good friends, are you conscious here this morning as you survey your heart and as you survey your life, are you conscious of the kind of appetite of which the Lord Jesus Christ speaks? Are you conscious of hungering and thirsting after righteousness? Are you conscious of hungering and thirsting after Christ? You see, the tragedy with man is this. I’ve mentioned it before, but I will reiterate it. Man has little or no consciousness of these things. He eats and he drinks. He buys and he sells. He plants and he builds. He marries a wife and is given in marriage. He grows up and he has children. He has grandchildren and eventually he dies. But the tragedy with man is this, that his life consists of these things, not bad in and of themselves. They are God-given, but the tragedy is that man has little or no sense of the great missing dimension which is that of Christ Himself, the One who is the bread of life. He’s not feeding his heart, and he’s not feeding his soul upon these things.

Good friends, do you have any sense of hunger or thirst for the things of God? Do you read the word of God? Are you conscious that you need to feed your soul, and feed your heart, and hide these things in your heart, lest you be hungry, lest you thirst? Isaac Watts puts it this way in that lovely hymn of his:

Blessed are the souls that thirst for grace
Hunger and long for righteousness
They shall be well-supplied and fed
With living streams and living bread

Good friends, do you know anything of these living streams, this living bread? We live very, very busy lives. I know that well myself, and I know well myself how that the busyness of our lives can often if we are not careful squeeze out and choke the life out of our souls. As we take care of our daily bread, so we tend to forget

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the Living Bread. We tend to forget the bread of life as we take care of our daily bread. Good friends, these things ought not so to be. We need to carve out time. We need to make sure we read, and we need to make sure we spend time in prayer. We need to read with our families. We need to read ourselves. We must live in the word of God. We must confront ourselves with this one who says of Himself the stupendous claim, “I am the bread of life.” Don’t neglect Him. He gives us living water. He gives us living bread. Don’t neglect Him, good friends. Feed your heart and your soul upon Him. Cultivate this appetite that God has given. Man isn’t simply a body. He’s also a soul. He’s body and soul. There is a spiritual dimension, and woe betide him if he merely eats and drinks, and buys and sells, and plants and builds, and marries a wife and is given in marriage, because in so doing, he’s actually forgetting and neglecting the spiritual dimension which God Himself has put and placed within him. Listen again to what the Savior says. “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness.” Yes, that wonderful imputed righteousness of Christ, given to all that believe, through justification by faith alone, and that imparted righteousness, that process of sanctification. Blessed is the man that hungers and thirsts after this. Have you come to Him? Have you believed on Him? Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ? Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God? Do you believe that He is the Messiah? Do you believe that He’s the second Person of the blessed Godhead who came down from Heaven and lived a perfect life here upon this earth, and who went to the cross to die for our sins, and who rose again the third day? You hunger and you thirst after Him, and you feed your heart, and your soul, and your life upon Him. This One who is living bread, this One who give us living waters, may each one of us here this day resolve to go to Him, to go back to Him, to go back to Him day after day, and to feed our hearts and our souls, and satisfy our hunger, and slake our thirst upon this blessed Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Amen.

“Hungering and Thirsting for Righteousness”

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