



Matthew 5:6

A Man After God's Own Heart

There is a spiritual progression in the beatitudes of Jesus as they build on one another. Each truth logically depends on the one before it.

The poor in spirit recognize their spiritual poverty and want to do something about it. Therefore, they mourn over their sinfulness and submit to the control of the Holy Spirit. This gentle attitude leads to a hungering and thirsting for righteousness of God in their personal lives.

Do you have a hard time letting go of certain attitudes or behaviors that keep you from being all that God wants you to be in Christ? Is there a pocket of spiritual poverty that refuses to let go? You have mourned over it and committed it to the Holy Spirit to help you, but it still seems so easy to grab, but hard to let go. Selfism—the worship and catering to self—is easy to grab and hold on to, but extremely hard to get rid of.

Can you sincerely describe your relationship with God saying, "I love You with all my heart?" Let's ask ourselves how intent we are on bringing about changes in some key areas of our lives.

HOW BADLY DO YOU WANT TO CHANGE?

In what area of spiritual growth do I want to bring about change? What is my poverty of spirit in my Christian walk? Is there an area of my Christian life where I can honestly say to myself, "I have a problem." What is my spiritual poverty? What is the sin I tend to hold on to tightly? Do I have a hard time thinking God's way?

For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways, declares the Lord.
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways
And My thoughts than your thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-9).

The Holy Spirit reveals to us areas of spiritual need that we would never be aware of otherwise. We would never think of it on our own because depravity has affected our way of thinking. Has the Spirit convicted you of a needy area? Has He put His finger on some sin that needs to be dealt with? Where is the area of spiritual growth that the Holy Spirit wants to bring about in my life?

Has it become so convicting that you are mourning over it? Do you feel the pain of death? Are you grieving over your spiritual poverty? Does it seem to have a strong grip over you? Do you want to be set free so badly that you hunger for it?

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God has provided the power to bring about change for the Spirit-controlled person. The Spirit gives us the self-discipline required to bring these changes. Our problem is so big that we cannot do it in our own strength. To what extent am I claiming the spiritual resources that God gives through His Spirit?

So the question before us is how badly do I want to change? Has it become so intense that it is like a man starving to death? Is it like someone who is extremely thirsty?

THE SPIRITUALLY PROSPEROUS HAVE A PASSION FOR PERSONAL RIGHTEOUSNESS

Jesus tells us we must have an intense longing after righteousness. He said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" (Matthew 5:6).

Jesus is not talking about literal physical food, but a right relationship with God.

This "hungering and thirsting" signifies a genuine continual craving of the soul. He is not referring to an occasional desire to be right, but a passionate craving for that which is right. This is a metaphor for an intense longing desire. You want it so strongly you feel the pangs for it. It is a matter of life and death. Your very existence depends on that one-cup of water, or that one piece of bread.

This intense craving is a hungering for something necessary in life. The inner person must be fed and it is the evidence of life. Spiritually dead people have no appetite for spiritual things. The apathetic are anemic in their spiritual life. What do I for crave in life? What am I hungry for?

The Greek grammar expresses a "hunger and thirst" for the whole things. I want the whole loaf of bread. I want the whole bucket of water.

Jesus told a one-sentence parable of the merchant who sold everything to purchase one great extremely valuable pearl of great wealth (Matthew 13:45-46). Jesus said, "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it."

Jesus said we must hunger and thirst after "righteousness." "Righteousness" means to be right with God, and in our personal lives it means being and doing what is right. It is a perfect conformity to God's holy law and His will. Righteousness is an attribute of God. Jesus will teach His disciples a little later, "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness . . . (Matthew 6:33).

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Another way of describing this hunger is found in Matthew 22:37 when Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." (Capitals in NASB indicate a quote from the Old Testament). If we love Him we will obey Him (John 14:15). If we have an obedience problem we have a love problem. This beatitude helps us to love Him with all our heart.

Imputed Righteousness

Jesus is addressing those who already belong to Him. Such individuals have been pronounced right with God based upon what Christ did for us. This is our legal righteousness or justification. God declared us righteous in His presence the very moment we believed on Jesus Christ as our personal Savior. This is not a self righteousness, or righteousness obtained by works of obedience or fulfilling a religious law. What God offers is righteousness by faith in Jesus Christ. "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Romans 10:4). The only obedience that satisfies God the Father is the obedience of Christ. We are declared to be in a right relationship with God based upon the person and atoning work of Jesus Christ. "That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation . . . for whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:9-10, 13).

This *imputed* righteousness is a right standing the believer has before God because of the atoning work of Jesus Christ on his behalf. It is our legal standing with God. It is totally unmerited. It is an act of grace on God's behalf toward the unrighteous person. This is not an achieved or merited righteousness. It is something God out of grace and love does on behalf of the believing sinner. The believer hungers for God's kind of righteousness. God imputes it or credits it to the believer's account. God is fully satisfied with the righteousness of Jesus Christ. "He [God] made Him [Jesus Christ] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

The legal basis of such imputed righteousness is the death of Christ. Jesus died as our substitute. He died on our behalf. He paid our sin debt to the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21; 8:9; Matt. 20:28; Mk. 10:45; Matt. 26:28; Eph. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:19; Rev. 5:9). This is our *position* in Christ. Cf. Ps. 32:1-2; Rom. 4:3, 5, 9b, 13, 16, 22, 24; Gal. 3:5ff.

Imparted Righteousness

In these words of Jesus there is the emphasis on the *impartation* of righteousness. We cannot earn our right relationship with God through works of righteousness, however since we have been justified by faith in the righteousness of Jesus Christ we will produce righteousness in our daily life. The term Jesus uses embraces both imputed and imparted righteousness.

There must be an intense desire to live a life of righteousness, to be pleasing to God with my daily life. This is my progressive sanctification. I fear for those who say they are saved, but care nothing for their daily walk with Christ. How tragic to be saved, secure and apathetic. Surely that is not what Jesus has in mind here. Jesus said God will fill those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. A little later in Matthew Jesus says, "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). Because we are saved we will want to live

"Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). Because we are saved we will want to live according to His teachings. He produces that hunger and thirsting in our new nature born of the Holy Spirit.

God is the one who places this hunger in the believer and then He produces this righteousness in the believer. It is His work of grace in the believer. It is not something a person can achieve of himself. But the believer does have to make himself available to God for Him to do it.

Just as the body hungers for food and water these people hunger to be like God. They have a deep passion for personal righteousness. It is the hunger for moral good. They want to obtain the righteousness that God demands in their lives. We depend not upon our own power to achieve righteousness, but upon God. It depends on our cooperating with the Holy Spirit. We allow Him to produce that righteous life in and through us.

It is only those who "hunger and thirst" after God's righteousness who will be fully satisfied. The righteousness imputed and imparted by God must be the object of intense hunger and thirsting.

It is important to stress both imputation and imparted righteousness in this beatitude. God satisfies both needs for righteousness. He satisfies the need for a right relationship with Him based on the imputation of Christ's righteousness. At the same time, we need to produce the kind of conduct that is pleasing to Him in our daily life.

"For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit" (Romans 8:3-5). The Holy Spirit imparts this righteousness in the believer. He produces them as we yield ourselves to Him.

Augustine hungered for righteousness and wrote, "You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You."

The apostle Paul prayed for the Philippian church, "that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which *comes* through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God" (Philippians 1:11). The Christian life is not static; it is a growing thing (3:12-14). We are to grow in Christlikeness and service.

On a scale from 1 to 10 how hungry am I for spiritual things? What is my attitude toward personal righteousness? What do I hunger for in life? To what extent do I hunger for God's Word? How is my appetite for the truth of the Bible? How is my appetite for fellowship with other believers? What is my attitude toward worship? What is my attitude toward deep spiritual truths? In what ways am I growing in my love for holiness? Do I long to be with mature Spirit-filled Christians? Would I rather be with carnal, immature people? How hungry am I for the works of the flesh? Do I sincerely pray "Lord, keep me from the temptation of my easily besetting sin?" Do I long to have God pronounce the verdict "righteous" as His decision over me in the judgment?

Jesus Christ is our perfect model of hungering and thirsting for righteousness.

A RIGHTEOUSNESS THAT SATISFIES

How does this hunger and thirst for righteousness become fully satisfied?

Jesus said those who have this passionate craving for righteousness will have a full measure. They won't get just a bite; they will get the whole thing. God will satisfy them fully. The original word was used to fatten animals. They will be fattened. We will be fully satisfied. But it comes only to those who "hunger and thirst," and to no one else.

Don't miss the emphasis Jesus is making. This is all a gift of His grace. Even in the Christian's life this righteousness is a gift of God. We do not achieve it in ourselves. Christ never disappoints anyone who hungers to do the will of God. He will accomplish His eternal purposes in everyone who desires to do it. The promise in this beatitude is if you hunger and thirst for righteousness you will be completely satisfied.

Jesus used the word "satisfied" with a root meaning the placing where the grass grows and animals graze. It describes cattle feeding on a beautiful, luxurious, green meadow. The ideas are to satisfy with food, to be fed full, and completely satisfied. But it is not a once and for all satisfaction so as to hunger no more. John Broadus says, "This satisfaction will be progressive in the present life, and become perfect as we enter upon the perfect world." "Hungering and thirsting" are in durative present tenses, i.e., the hungering and thirsting continues and increases in the very act of being satisfied.

The passive "shall be filled" denotes a gift of God to those fulfilling the condition making them "righteous" in His presence. God does it. It is His gift to the believing sinner.

Lord Jesus increase my hunger for you. Please increase my capacity to love you. It was to the church at Ephesus the risen glorified Lord Jesus in heaven said these haunting words, "I have this one thing against you, you have lost your first love" (Revelation 2:4). Oh, Lord don't let that happen in our lives. If and when we do find ourselves guilty of losing our first love here is the answer. Jesus said, "Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place —unless you repent" (v. 5).

Even the apostle Paul did not come to a place of no further growth in his spiritual life. In a context which speaks of being conformed to the image and likeness of Christ he says, "Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained" (Philippians 3:15-16). Paul makes it clear that he had not come to the place in his Christian life where growth in spiritual maturity has been completed, beyond which there is no room for future development, and that as a result he is now in a state of absolute spiritual maturity. He has not reached a spiritual impasse of non development. I pray we never do either.

The word "perfect" here is not referring to sinless perfection. He is talking about relative, spiritual mature, stages of growth. We are perfect in growth at a certain stage in our lives. Ann and I have an 18 month old granddaughter who is perfect for an eighteen month old, but not for an eighteen year old. It means "full —grown" in contradistinction to undeveloped. It is used of a full grown man as opposed to an undeveloped youth. It is used to mean a professor of "mature in mind" who is "qualified in a subject" as opposed to a new student in the subject. In other words, there is plenty of room for us to continue to grow in His image and likeness until He returns for us.

This attitude is the opposite of the righteousness of the Pharisees which was fatal. Theirs was a self —righteousness. In our day it is Jesus Christ plus anything else. To believe oneself to be in possession of righteousness of his own making or contribution is fatal. We receive an imputed righteousness that is

righteousness of his own making or contribution is fatal. We receive an imputed righteousness that is imparted through the work of the Holy Spirit. Even what we produce is of grace. God does it through His Holy Spirit working in and through us as we yield to Him. *Dikaosune* is plainly a gift which God gives to those who ask for it. It is the only way God will give it. We must depend upon the power of God to achieve moral righteousness in our personal life.

There is perhaps no greater secret of progress in Christian living than a healthy, hearty, spiritual appetite. How good is my spiritual appetite? What do I crave in my spiritual life? God satisfies only those who are thirsty.

Not only must we have a sense of poverty in righteousness, but Jesus emphasized we must "have a passionate and persistent longing for it" (Plummer). How serious am I about having a right relationship with God? Do I crave for a mature, intimate love relationship with Jesus Christ? Am I serious about it? How strongly do I crave that kind of relationship with Him?

What am I hungering and thirsting for in life? Complete this sentence: "I would be happy if _____?"
"For to me living is _____, and to die is _____."

The righteousness in our daily life includes a moral righteousness that pleases God in our character and conduct. This is an inner righteousness of the heart, mind and motive that manifest it in our outward behavior. The root of that righteousness is in the heart. Our imputed right relationship with God should work itself out in our moral imparted righteousness. The Holy Spirit works out what He has placed within. This is what we should be hungering and thirsting for in our daily life. Martin Luther expressed this when he said, "What is required is a hunger and thirst for righteousness that can never be curbed or stopped or sated, one that looks for nothing and cares for nothing except the accomplishment and maintenance of the right, despising everything that hinders this end." This kind of righteousness affects every area of our lives.

Only observed behavior changes. To whom am I accountable besides God? Do you have someone other than God to whom you are accountable?

In a very real sense we are what we eat spiritually.

What is it that I seek with all my desire and desire it above all else? Do I have a burning thirst for God's will to be done in my life, home, work and professional life? Do I long for God's will to be done like people who are hungry and thirsty long for food and drink? Do I want more than anything else to do God's will? Do I want others to do likewise? Do I want to see the members of my church seek with all their heart to do God's will, or am I pursuing selfish pleasure?

In my intimate love relationship with Christ there should constant appetite. There should be a daily hunger for God. There is a constant hunger only to be satisfied and come again and again to be refreshed by His holy presence. We are to keep coming and eating and drinking of his well that never runs dry.

There is no indication in this passage that we will have an experience that will say we have arrived. It is just the opposite. It is a growing satisfaction, a repeated process of spiritual growth. Jesus keeps before us the expectation of a future enlargement. Only when we see Jesus in heaven will we hunger and thirst no more.

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