

Sunday, September 2, 2018

This week and, Lord willing, next week, I would like to go over that section of the scripture known as the Beatitudes (“declarations of blessedness”). We find them as the introduction to the Sermon on the Mount, which spans Matthew 5-7. To put it into context, very high level, Matthew presents Jesus Christ as the King, and this sermon describes the citizens of His Kingdom. A main message of the sermon is that in order for you to enter into the kingdom of heaven, your righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees. Those men were focused on outward appearances but had corrupt hearts. So, though a large portion of the sermon deals with behavior, don’t ever forget that your behavior is ultimately useless if you don’t have the proper spirit and heart behind what you do. What you are will dictate what you do, and why you do it. So, this is where we find ourselves in Matthew 5-7: Jesus goes up into a mountain in Galilee, sits down, and kicks off this excellent sermon with the Beatitudes, which primarily deal with heart issues and attitudes. They are the essential characteristics of the people of God; the elect of God; those people who are joyful subjects of His realm. You can’t be part of the kingdom of God if you don’t have these characteristics, so I would hope that it would be of utmost importance to everyone here to look into these things and examine ourselves. These are heart-searching and convicting, and it’s important to reset every once in a while, go back to the basics and remember why you’re here.

So, let’s start by reading them:

**“Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when *men* shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great *is* your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.” (Matthew 5:3-12)**

The word “blessed” is translated from the Greek word “makarios,” which means blessed, happy, or fortunate. Jesus is telling us who the truly happy people are, and His intention is for His people to be happy. Human beings in general desire happiness. We seek happiness. There’s a bestselling book called “Flow” by a psychologist named Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi that begins like this: “*Twenty-three hundred years ago Aristotle concluded that, more than anything else, men and women seek happiness. While happiness itself is sought for its own sake, every*

*other goal – health, beauty, money, or power – is valued only because we expect that it will make us happy. Much has changed since Aristotle's time...yet on this most important issue very little has changed in the intervening centuries. We do not understand what happiness is any better than Aristotle did, and as for learning how to attain that blessed condition, one could argue that we have made no progress at all.”* Then he proceeds to lay out his theory for how to be truly happy, and it involves you taking control and making it happen by entering into a state of consciousness that he calls “flow” where you become engrossed in some activity that brings you joy. This is just one example of how the world tells you how to be happy, and it happens to be the exact opposite of the first beatitude. You know that there is no shortage of this worldly wisdom, and we are not immune from being influenced by it. But friends, don’t let the world tell you what it is to be happy. These beatitudes are diametrically opposed to what the world says will make you happy. Sin is deceitful and will tell you that it is the way to happiness, but it leads ultimately only to unhappiness, misery, sorrow, and damnation. Don’t listen to the world. Listen to what Jesus is saying here. He is essentially saying, “The only people on earth who are truly happy are those who are in my kingdom, and these people (and only these people) have these characteristics: they are poor in spirit, mournful, meek, hungry and thirsty after righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, and recipients of persecution for My sake.” So, we’re talking about true happiness here. Not some superficial, temporary happiness, but a lasting happiness that results from being saved. You want to know how to be happy? You want to know what it takes to be in the kingdom of heaven? You want some evidence that you’re a citizen of His kingdom? You’ll find it in the Beatitudes. “Happy is that people, whose God is the Lord.” (Psalm 114:15).

Just a few general observations before getting into them specifically, so we don’t miss the forest for the trees:

1. All these beatitudes describe all His people. It’s not that some of His people possess some of them and others possess others. Every single sheep of God possesses all these attributes; however, we may not possess all of them to the same degree all the time. While we live in these bodies of sin, we certainly don’t fulfill all of them as we ought to. We may look at them and feel ashamed and totally inadequate. We may pursue some sin for a season and stray away from them. But the general bent of our lives after we’re saved is that we all possess all of them to some degree.
2. They are not natural proclivities. Rather, these are gifts of the Spirit. For example, some among us are, by nature, meeker in character than others. That’s not what this is talking about. Your biological tendencies are not what’s at stake here. This is a spiritual matter, and the spirit can be renewed only by God.

3. They are not mere ethical statements. This is not general advice on how to live a moral life. This isn't talking about something that you can accomplish by changing a few outward behaviors. It's talking about changes in the deepest recesses of your heart.
4. They are not laid out haphazardly. There is a definite order to them. They are all interrelated, and they build on each other. It starts with spiritual poverty, which leads to mourning over our sins, which leads to a meek heart. In that state, we hunger and thirst for righteousness, which is something that we don't have and can't produce on our own. This results in us being merciful, pure in heart, and peacemakers, and we will consequently produce hostility from and be persecuted by a God-despising world. The first three have to do with our need, the fourth shows how that need is satisfied, and the remaining show the result of that satisfaction.

How you react to these beatitudes says a lot about you. Do you see these attributes in yourself? Do you realize that you fail at them, but you nevertheless strive to be this way? Or, in your heart of hearts, do you rebel against them, become angry, and try to explain them away to justify your sin? Do you secretly despise and have contempt for the character of people that are described in them? "Examine yourselves" (2 Corinthians 13:5).

### **Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven**

This is where it all starts. This is how Christ chose to begin the sermon. Without being poor in spirit, none of the rest of it matters. Blessedness begins with spiritual poverty. Blessedness is for people who KNOW that they are spiritually bankrupt. This word translated "poor" is the Greek word "ptochos" which comes from the verb "ptosso", meaning "to crouch, to cower". The idea is beggarly, helpless, powerless, needy. It is the same word used to describe the beggar Lazarus in Luke 16:20. Picture a man who has realized his absolute inability to care for himself and is reduced to going out on the streets to cower and beg. He has reached a point where he is ashamed and is completely dependent on someone else for sustenance.

But this isn't just a poor person – it's a person who is poor in spirit. It's a person who has come to the realization that he has absolutely nothing to bring to the table, from a spiritual standpoint. It's a person who knows that he must depend fully on God for all things. It's a person who understands that he can't do it himself.

You can't just jump into the middle of the Sermon on the Mount and think that you can make a few tweaks here and there to your life, and then you'll be OK. It has to start with being poor in spirit. There was a preacher in the mid-1900s by the name of D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones who put it like this: "*There is a mountain that you have to scale, the heights you have to climb; and the first thing you must realize, as you look at that mountain which you are told you must*

*ascend, is that you cannot do it, that you are utterly incapable in and of yourself, and that any attempt to do it in your own strength is proof positive that you have not understood it."*

Poverty of spirit is not a one-time thing; it's a thing that is a constant battle. How quickly do we forget that it is God who gives us repentance, God who gives us faith, God who orders our steps, God who keeps us from falling, and God who will finally present us faultless before the presence of His glory! And all the while, your flesh is pulling in the opposite direction and trying to find every way it can to get you off the path. How soon we forget that and attribute good things to ourselves! Here is a reality check: God has been glorified not because of you, but in spite of you. It's not your flesh doing the good works, but rather it's Christ living in you. This is a hard pill for some people to swallow.

Blessedness starts with being poor in spirit. You truly cannot see how precious Christ is unless you're poor in spirit. Look at your works. You don't meet God's standards. You CAN'T meet God's standards. You can't please God. Remember that the standard here is God – "Be ye holy; for I am holy." (1 Peter 1:16). The standard isn't some other person. Humans tend to recreate a new standard in their own image, and the standard is always someone who you think is worse than you, because then you can always say, "At least I'm better than that guy." No – the standard is God, and you've failed to meet that standard. And I'm not just talking about your worst works...I'm talking about the best things that you have ever done in your entire lives. All your achievements, your morality, your righteousness, etc. The best thing that you've ever done for the cause of God is defiled by your sin. When you are to the point that you can look at all your fleshly accomplishments and count them as dung, and when you can look at your righteousness as filthy rags, then you are on your way to being poor in spirit:

**"Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead." (Philippians 3:8-11)**

**"But we are all as an unclean *thing*, and all our righteousnesses *are* as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away." (Isaiah 64:6)**

As I said, this is a constant battle. One of my frequent prayers is for the Lord to give me a sense of my own sinful nature vis-à-vis the holiness of God, because it's so easy to slip away from that and lose sight of it and fall into self-righteousness.

Note, my friends, that this poverty of spirit is the precise opposite of how the world looks at things. They like people who are confident, self-sufficient, self-reliant; people who are full of self-assurance, machismo, self-respect, ambition. We've all heard phrases like "Express yourself," "Believe in yourself," "You can do anything you set your mind to," "Pull yourself up by your bootstraps," "God helps those who help themselves," etc. Christ starts by telling you to put all that foolishness away. The reality is that God helps those who CAN'T help themselves, and who know that they can't help themselves. The first step to being blessed, the first step to being a citizen of the kingdom of God, is to recognize that you can't be a citizen of the kingdom of God on your own. You don't have what it takes. You aren't capable. You have to rely on an outside source to give you what you need, and that, of course, is God.

Don't mistake this gift of God for a natural inclination of the flesh. This isn't talking about someone who is naturally lazy, or lethargic, or passive, or indifferent, or cowardly. Those attributes are usually accompanied by a faux humility and self-deprecation. Likewise, this isn't referring to someone who is always moping about talking about how low and unworthy he is, because he wants to communicate to everyone how poor in spirit he is. This isn't talking about a person who makes a big show of some sacrifice he's made. These types of people are so far from being poor in spirit that they are now glorying in their perceived "poverty of spirit"!

We see a great example of being poor in spirit in Luke 18:

**"And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men *are*, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as *his* eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." (Luke 18:9-14)**

There are plenty of other examples you'll find in Job, Jacob, Gideon, Moses, David, Isaiah, Daniel, Peter, etc. Just looking at Isaiah:

**"Then said I, Woe *is* me! for I am undone; because I *am* a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."**  
**(Isaiah 6:5)**

When he saw God...when he had some sense of the glory and holiness of God...he was undone! He recognized that the just thing to do would be to cut him off and destroy him. But perhaps the greatest example is in Christ Himself:

**“I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.” (John 5:30)**

**“Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.”  
(John 14:10)**

In other words, as a man, He can neither do nor speak anything on His own but is fully dependent on His Father. That's how we should be.

Now, what is the reward of being poor in spirit? “Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” The construction of the original Greek means “theirs, and theirs alone” (and this is true for all of the beatitudes). Nobody else is in His kingdom, and nobody else can be in His kingdom. What is this kingdom? Well, I won't get too deep into this, but there is presently a spiritual kingdom of God, and we are part of that. The kingdom of God is within us (Luke 17:21). We get to partake of the spiritual blessings that are part of that kingdom, and we have the King ruling over us and protecting us, sustaining us, comforting us, etc. There is also some reference to the future millennial kingdom of Christ, and then the eternal kingdom to come.

### **Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted**

Mourning is a thing with which we are all familiar. We have all gone through events in our lives that were grievous and sorrowful. It's a normal human thing to go through, and a normal way to react. Ecclesiastes 3:4 tells us that there is “a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance.” There are innumerable reasons to mourn...some reasonable, and some improper. For example, when Sarah died, “Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her.” (Genesis 23:2). That would be a normal, expected thing to do. When Absalom died, David said, “O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!” (2 Samuel 18:33). We might characterize that behavior as “inordinate.” A lot of the mourning that goes on in this world is on the improper and inordinate side of things, like mourning because we haven't been able to carry on some sin that we desire to fulfill, or mourning because God isn't doing what we want Him to do, when we want Him to do it, and how we want Him to do it.

But this verse isn't talking about any of these kinds of mourning. It's not talking about mourning over a death, or some tragic event, or a sickness, or your life circumstances. And it's certainly not talking about someone who walks around with a sad, fake-pious face. It's talking about mourning in your heart for sin. This is a spiritual mourning. It's not mourning because you feel a little bit guilty about committing a sin...it's mourning because you've offended God, and mourning because it's part of your warp and woof to offend God. The word translated "mourn" here is the strongest of all the Greek words used to express sorrow or grief – it is a deep sense of grief, sorrow, lamenting. It can be translated "wail" or "bewail." It's the same word used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 5 about the fornication going on in the Corinthian church:

**"And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you." (1 Corinthians 5:2)**

And James in James 4:

**"Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse *your* hands, ye sinners; and purify *your* hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and *your* joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up." (James 4:8-10)**

Like every other verse in the Bible, it's dangerous to take this beatitude out of its context, and to not compare it to other scripture. This verse is commonly misapplied to anyone who is going through some trying time that results in them mourning and grieving and sorrowing. The immediate context is that it comes right after "blessed are the poor in spirit." There is a direct link here. If I see what God requires of me, and I see that I'm incapable of meeting that standard without Him, then I'm poor in spirit. And if I'm poor in spirit, then I'm going to mourn about that state of sin that I know I'm in and that I can't fix on my own. And I'm not going to just do this once...I'm going to live my life like that. Any time I sin, it's going to produce mourning in my spirit, which leads to repentance. We can read about this kind of mourning and sorrow in 2 Corinthians 7:

**"Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death." (2 Corinthians 7:9-10)**

In fact, I would go so far as to say that the longer you follow God, the more mournful you become, because the more you know about God and your own wretchedness, the more you understand how spiritually bankrupt you actually are.

And not only do we mourn for our own sins, we mourn for the sins of others. We mourn when we see the devastating effect that sin has had on the world. We mourn at the arrogant, rebellious, treacherous nature of sin. We see this in Christ. He certainly didn't mourn for His own sin, because He was sinless, but He did mourn for sin. He was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3). He was "grieved for the hardness of their hearts" (Mark 3:5). He wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41) and He wept at the death of Lazarus (John 11:35). No doubt His sorrow and grief were mingled with compassion, for example, "because they were as sheep not having a shepherd" (Mark 6:34), but a large part of His sorrow was because of what sin had wrought in the world. "The wages of sin is death." (Romans 6:23). He wasn't sorrowful in the garden of Gethsemane, for example, because He was worried about dying...He was sorrowful because of that great burden of the sins of His people that He was to carry to the cross.

Of all the beatitudes, this is probably the one that seems most ludicrous to the world. You have to mourn to be blessed? You have to be sad to be happy? Yes. You can't be comforted if you don't first mourn. You can't experience joy unless you first mourn. Most churches don't want to deal with sin...they just want to jump straight to the joy and happiness part. "Jesus wants you to come as you are" – meaning, "as long as you say you believe in Jesus, you can keep living the same way you've always lived." "Jesus will make you prosperous" – meaning, "Jesus exists to fulfill all of your desires and ambitions for you." "Jesus just wants you to be happy" – meaning, "if what you're doing makes you happy, then keep it up because you are fulfilling Jesus's wishes." They want to pretend that comfort can come without mourning. Faux Christians frequently have a fake, superficial smile plastered on their faces because they think it will attract people – any gloomy and pessimistic talk of mourning will turn people away, they think. They don't want to tell anyone that they're sinning, let alone tell them that they need to mourn for those sins – that might hurt their psyche and turn them away from Jesus...we need to cater to the Snowflake Generation! They want to join with the rest of the world and say, "let's not dwell on negativity...we're not really that bad." It's time to put the glibness and frivolity away and mourn for your sins! You really are that bad – and if you really believed what you say you believe, you'd see that your sins cost Christ His life.

The promise here is that those who mourn shall be comforted (and only those who mourn shall be comforted). Those who truly mourn for their sins will repent of those sins and will find a Savior in Christ. We are talking about the comfort of being saved. The comfort of knowing that we have been brought into the kingdom. The comfort of knowing our sins are forgiven, and that there will be a day when we will be finally and completely delivered from sin. The comfort of knowing that we have been reconciled with God. You can't have any of that if you don't mourn! Really, our lives should be marked by constant mourning for our sins, and constant comfort that we are forgiven of those sins. Only then can we be truly blessed.

## **Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth**

The next step in the Beatitudes is “blessed are the meek.” Those people who are poor in spirit and who have therefore mourned for their sins will consequently be meek. Some synonyms of meek would be gentle, humble, or mild. It means that you are not asserting your own will but are rather quietly and willingly submitting to the will of God. It is the opposite of being rebellious, stubborn, or self-interested. It is the opposite of characteristics that the world holds in high esteem, like self-reliance or self-assertiveness or exercising your “rights.”

Again, we’re not talking about a natural disposition here. Some people are naturally easygoing or nice. There are some people who just don’t like conflict, so they’re going to “agree to disagree” or would be willing to compromise just to avoid an altercation. That’s not at all what this is talking about. It is not weakness or cowardice or impotence or lack of conviction, but a complete humbling of yourself in the sight of the Lord (James 4:10). This meekness is not something we can manufacture ourselves – it is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23).

Looking into Psalm 37 will give us a good idea of what it means, because Christ seems to be quoting from that passage:

**“Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass. Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil. For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while, and the wicked *shall not be*: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it *shall not be*. But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.”**

**(Psalm 37:7-11)**

Our attitude should be that we aren’t out to avenge ourselves, but we will stand up for the cause of Christ. We aren’t going to fight our own battles, but we will fight His battles, using His weapons, defending His name. Are you more concerned when you are maligned, or when Christ is maligned? If you think that you need to set the record straight and defend yourself whenever anyone says something about you or does something to you, you have the wrong attitude – that is not meekness. Put the self-pity aside, don’t dwell on injuries you’ve received, don’t seek revenge, don’t retaliate, don’t bear grudges. In other words, stop being preoccupied with “self”. Don’t worry about defending yourself, because there’s nothing there to defend. And if this should be our attitude when dealing with the enemies of God, how much more when a loved one approaches you with helpful words of exhortation?

We have a lot of good examples of meekness in the scripture (Abraham, Joseph, David, Moses, Stephen, Paul, etc.), but Christ is the premiere example. He was not weak. He was not cowardly. He was not a compromiser. He wasn't a "peace at any cost" preacher. He said, "I am meek and lowly in heart." (Matthew 11:29). His focus was to be about His Father's business (Luke 2:49) and to live in absolute submission to His will: "Not my will, but thine, be done." (Luke 22:42). You see His meek character in how He reacted in the face of fierce persecution leading up to and during His crucifixion – He had the right to fight and to make a case for Himself, but He humbly submitted to the will of His Father. During His ministry, He had no interest in "making a name" for Himself, but desired only to glorify His Father. He carefully avoided any appearance of vainglory and the applause of men. For example:

**"But when Jesus knew it, he withdrew himself from thence: and great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all; And charged them that they should not make him known: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory. And in his name shall the Gentiles trust."** (Matthew 12:15-21)

One of the greatest passages written about His meekness is in Philippians 2:

**"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."** (Philippians 2:5-8)

He is God, but He emptied Himself, humbling Himself to become a man and a servant and to live in total submission and dependence on the Father. A wonderful example of humility that should make us all ashamed.

And what is the reward here? "They shall inherit the earth." In some sense, we have already inherited the earth. We have an allotment in His kingdom and are satisfied and content with those things that God has given us, and we have a guarantee of our ultimate inheritance, even the "earnest of the Spirit in our hearts." (2 Corinthians 1:22). It will certainly be fulfilled in the millennial reign of Christ, and beyond to eternity. We have some level of eager anticipation for the coming of Christ and His kingdom, but we won't have a part in ruling and reigning with

Him if we are devoid of meekness. “The Lord taketh pleasure in His people: He will beautify the meek with salvation.” (Psalm 149:4). Only the meek are saved.

### **Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled**

The first three beatitudes primarily have to do with a heart that has been broken of pride and self-reliance, and now that we reach the fourth beatitude, there is a bit of a shift. Now we start to see the result of that broken heart, which is to seek the remedy. “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness.” In some ways, this is the pinnacle of the whole list of beatitudes – the first three lead up to it, and the remainder flow from it.

The first question is, what does it mean to hunger and thirst? We don’t understand what it really means to be hungry and thirsty from a physical standpoint. The idea is complete desperation where you’re going to die if you don’t eat or drink soon. None of us has ever been in that state. On the spiritual side of things, we are talking about a very strong desire or an intense need. We need righteousness, and we are desperate to get it.

A lot of people have strong desires for the wrong things, and they waste their lives pursuing those things. This isn’t talking about a hunger to change the circumstances of your life, like to have a more enjoyable job, or to make you more comfortable, or to cure an illness, or to help your economic situation, or to help your family situation. The hunger isn’t even after a state of happiness or blessedness – that will be the result, but it’s not the thing you should be hungering after. Your hunger should be for righteousness, and everything else will fall into place. If you truly hunger after righteousness, you’ll be filled, and will consequently be happy and blessed.

Righteousness is just as essential to your spirit as food and drink is to your natural body. If you get nothing else, get this: it is about desperation...if I don’t get righteousness, I’m going to perish. And like the rest of the beatitudes so far, this isn’t a one-time thing. I don’t hunger and thirst once, get a little taste of righteousness, and then move on to bigger and better things – this is a way of life. It’s a constant cycle of hungering and thirsting, being filled, and then wanting more. It is like Paul in Philippians 3 – scarcely anybody on earth knew as much about the Lord Jesus Christ as Paul did, yet he continued wanting to “know him.”

So the next question is, what is righteousness? Simply stated, it means that you want to be right with God. You want your sins to be forgiven. You want to be reconciled. You want to be in fellowship and communion with God. You want to be conformed to Christ. You want to be like Christ. It is not some vague, amorphous idea of “living a moral life” or being “a generally good person.” It consists of two things:

1. Justification – this means being saved and declared righteous by having the righteousness of Christ imputed to you.
2. Sanctification – this has to do with being conformed to Christ in how you live your life. You want to be free from the power of sin, and free from your corrupt nature. You have a desire to obey God and be like Christ. You have received the imputed righteousness of Christ, so now it's time to bring your life into line with that. This is often referred to as "progressive sanctification" because it is not something that happens immediately – it is a life-long becoming more and more holy, like Christ.

In the original language, it is hungering and thirsting after ALL righteousness, not just a part of it. I want all of it. I hunger and thirst after a perfect, complete righteousness, and the promise is that "they shall be filled." The word translated "filled" means to be foddered up, to gorge, to fill until satisfied. David said, "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness." (Psalm 17:15). Nothing else will satisfy. John said, "When He shall appear, we shall be like Him...and every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." (1 John 3:2-3). We have a duty to purify ourselves. If we are truly hungering and thirsting after righteousness, we aren't going to wade around in the cesspools of life, waiting for God to pull us out...we're going to pursue purity and righteousness.

One final note is that this is a statement of the gospel in a nutshell. "Salvation is of the Lord" (Jonah 2:9). We don't naturally hunger and thirst after righteousness...this is not something that we can produce in ourselves. We hunger and thirst after a lot of sinful and indifferent things, but we don't naturally hunger and thirst after righteousness. When we do, it is a gift of God. And when we hunger and thirst after righteousness, we have a guarantee that we will be filled. But we can't do anything to fill ourselves – it's purely an act of God. We are filled to the uttermost with the righteousness of Christ and stand perfect and sinless in God's sight. Meanwhile, He conforms our lives to be like Christ through the sanctification of the Spirit until we are finally standing in the presence of God with our new bodies, in a state of real sinlessness. "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." (John 6:37). If you hunger and thirst after righteousness, Christ is not going to cast you away – He's going to fill you. On the other hand, if you don't hunger and thirst after righteousness, you have the wrath of God abiding on you.

Next week, Lord willing, we will be able to finish up the remaining beatitudes. That is, blessed are the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. Those may be even more convicting to our hearts than the four from this week. I love you. Amen.