

## **“KINGDOM CONSTITUTION” – Lessons in the Sermon on the Mount**

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### **Matthew 5:6 “Hungering for Righteousness” - part 1**

Today we come to examine a most foundational and provocative beatitude, “*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*”

√ It is foundational because it turns the corner on the Beatitudes to offer solution for our “poor in spirit,” “mourning over sin” and “meek” selves by giving us positive direction for our inner longings – the quest for righteousness.

√ It is provocative because it promises blessed satisfaction – the very longing of every searching heart, yet that which is so difficult to possess.

#### **THE SEARCH**

Wise King Solomon wrote long ago:

***Ecclesiastes 3:11*** *God has made everything appropriate [lit. “beautiful”] in its time; also He has set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end.*

This means that God has put the concept of eternity – something beyond our present existence and understanding – into our heart, and yet He has withheld from us all that it takes to discover it.

St Augustine, the great 4<sup>th</sup> century theologian, said:

*“Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless, until it rest in Thee.*

We find ourselves with an unfulfilled longing for blessed happiness. We try to satisfy it with toys, recreations, vacations, family, parties, church; and even with intoxicants, affairs or secret distractions – but the longing remains.

In this regards, Isaiah the prophet asked this question:

***Isaiah 55: 2a*** *Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy?*

And then he gave this answer from God, in verses 1 and 2b:

***Isaiah 55:1, 2b*** *Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and delight yourself in abundance.*

We seek and we do not find, for we seek in the wrong places. While our search for happiness might yield temporary fulfillment, the satisfaction never lasts. The thrills and purchases and adventures leave only memories – often broken ones. And the longing for blessed satisfaction remains.

Even the Christian who seeks to find meaning and fulfillment through spiritual endeavors often seeks in the wrong places. We hear that others have found spiritual meaning or power in another church, or through a certain spiritual program, or by some “second blessing” or by following a certain endowed leader. And we seek but do not find, and become disenchanted and discouraged.

The problem is that in both the case of the pleasure seeker or the Christian experience seeker, the seeking is not after what God clearly reveals is what will bring the ultimate satisfaction.

The great C. S. Lewis “hit the nail on the head” when he said:

*“If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.”*

**So the truth is, I must seek something “out of this world” to satisfy. And Jesus reveals in the fourth Beatitude that this elusive, “out of this world” satisfaction will only come from seeking and finding RIGHTEOUSNESS.**

#### **THE NATURE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS**

I think we can agree from this Beatitude that righteousness is what we must long for and seek, in order to obtain the promised blessed satisfaction. This is confirmed in one of the most beloved and well known Scriptures from this Sermon on the Mount:

**Matthew 6:33** *But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*

“All these things” would be the food, shelter, clothing and all the other needs of life. It would also include all our “wants” that God would deem acceptable to Him to give – in other words, all the other things that would bring us God-approved happiness. So this Scripture and the fourth Beatitude are teaching essentially the same truth. Seek or “hunger” after righteousness and you will discover the blessed satisfaction for which you long. The “other things” are a by-product of seeking righteousness first and above all else. To seek the “other things” will never bring the “other things,” but in seeking righteousness you will find both righteousness and “all these things.” This is critical truth revealed.

Now I want to point out a couple other references to “righteousness” in the Sermon on the Mount that will inform our understanding of the nature of righteousness. Note that “righteousness” occurs here in the fourth Beatitude and in the eighth, or last, Beatitude as well

**Matthew 5:10a** *“Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness.”*

The first three Beatitudes spoke of our need of righteousness, as they spoke of being “poor in spirit,” “mourning over sin” and being “meek.” Then as we hunger and thirst for righteousness we are filled and satisfied.

Now notice what happens in the next three Beatitudes. We are merciful, we are pure in heart and we are peacemakers. And then in the final and eighth Beatitude we are “persecuted for the sake of righteousness sake.” If we take these Beatitudes to have a progression to them, does this not imply that the “righteousness sake” for which we are persecuted is a result of our being merciful, pure in heart and peacemakers? That makes perfect sense. It is for being these very things as a righteous Christian that brings persecution.

So what have we learned here about righteousness? At least in part, it is

**(1) being merciful to others**

**(2) being pure in heart in our motives and actions**

**(2) and being a peacemaker in bringing people together and toward God**

Now look at one other verse from the Sermon on the Mount that mentions “righteousness” and let us see how this confirms our findings thus far.

**Matthew 5:20** *For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.*

This statement precedes six illustrations of how our righteousness must be greater than the religious leaders of the Jewish nation. We must not be angry against a brother but seek peace. We must not look upon another lustfully. We must honor our marriage vows. Our word must be our bond. We must learn to turn the other cheek when wronged. We must love our enemy, praying that they might come to Jesus. In short, these tell us again that we must be merciful, pure in heart and a peacemaker.

This is an excellent portrait of righteousness, but only a part of the whole. For righteousness is “being right in God’s eyes.” In a word, it is being HOLY. If being poor in spirit, mourning over sin and being meek is the emptying of self, then hungering and thirsting after righteousness is the filling up of oneself with all the fullness and holiness of God. It is a hungering for sinlessness.

**1 Peter 1:15-16** *Like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”*

## **TO HUNGER AND THIRST**

David in his Psalm 42 says it so poetically:

**Psalm 42:1-2a** *As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God.  
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.*

Here David writes that it is his passion, his hunger, to know and be like the living God. Righteousness for David is God-likeness. And that must be our passion as well. And it IS our passion if we are citizens of the kingdom. For remember, that these Beatitudes are not indications of what we SHOULD be or to what we should ATTAIN, but what we ARE as believers. We are to recognize that this is what we are in Christ, and then gratefully and humbly display it for all to see. I believe the implication here is not only that we are to be generally “hungry” or “thirsty” for righteousness as in “I need a sandwich” and “I need a drink of water.” When the prodigal son (Luke 15) was hungry, he went to eat pig food. But when he was starving he returned to his father to get “real” food. I believe Jesus is teaching that we must be “starving” for God’s “real” food of righteousness, which like the prodigal, will drive us to Him and Him alone to be filled with it.

In John’s first epistle he uses two magnificent picture words to describe God in His righteousness: GOD IS LIGHT (1 John 5:5) and GOD IS LOVE (1 John 4:8). As we seek, yea “hunger and thirst,” for God’s holy righteousness here are two practical markers to keep in mind.

1. We must be passionate for the LIGHT of truth and purity. After all,

**1 John 1:5b** *God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.*

Our world is immersed in the darkness of sin. For now, it is in “slavery to corruption” (Romans 8:21). We must seek the light and be the light to our darkened world – with passion. Practically speaking – when confronting a decision, SEEK THE LIGHT. Seek the right, seek integrity, seek mercy, seek purity of heart, seek peacemaking.

2. We must be passionate for LOVE in dealing with all we meet. After all,

**1 John 4:8-9** *God is love. By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him.*

For most, love is withheld, except for to a few selected family and friends, or to those who are “loving” to us. Our passion for righteousness must express itself in God’s love to ALL we encounter – however they come across to us. This is HARD. But God has given us the wherewithal to do it, if we will only allow Him to love through us. Practically speaking – SEEK LOVE in every response and reaction. See Jesus in the other one, and respond as you would to Him. He will give you the words and heart to love, if you will hunger and thirst to love as He has loved you.

There is so much in this little fourth Beatitude that I have chosen to take a second week to plumb more of its depths. So next week we will have week two, where I, following the pattern of Martyn Lloyd-Jones will examine the tests of our spiritual appetite. Read Chapter 8 of your companion book, “Studies in the Sermon on the Mount” and be better prepared.

For now,

- 1. SEEK AFTER BEING RIGHT IN GOD’S EYES ABOVE ALL ELSE**
- 2. SEEK AFTER MERCY, PURITY and PEACEMAKING**
- 3. SEEK AFTER LIGHT and LOVE**

And you will be well on the road to blessed satisfaction!  
Amen!

**Romans 3:21-26** But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

**Romans 5:17** For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.

**Hebrews 12:11** All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.