

American Decency Association

PO Box 202, Fremont, MI 49412 231-924-4050 www.americandecency.org

Encouraging Christians to guard their hearts

July 2017

Blessed Are Those Who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness

By: Dan Doriani



The first four beatitudes all describe the needs of a disciple. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness” is the last in the series (Matt. 5:3–6). Jesus first said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (v. 3). To be poor in spirit is to know one’s spiritual neediness and dependence on God (Ps. 34:6; Zeph. 3:12).

This beatitude leads to the second. The poor in spirit mourn their poverty (Matt. 5:4). They mourn their own sin first, then mourn all sin. This is a blessed mourning, since God will comfort those who mourn

over sin. Psalm 119:136 says, “My eyes shed streams of tears, because people do not keep your law.” James also calls for mourning. “Cleanse your hands, you sinners. ... Mourn and weep” (James 4:8–9).

The second beatitude leads to the third: those who know their spiritual poverty and mourn it will be meek. To be meek is the opposite of arrogance, jealousy, and selfish ambition (2 Cor. 10:1; James 3:13–14; 1 Peter 3:15–16). Meekness contrasts with the self-assertion that is born of selfishness. Because the meek know their spiritual poverty and mourn it, they refuse to exalt themselves.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness” is then the pivotal beatitude (Matt. 5:6). If disciples know their sin and weakness, they will also ask God to meet their need for righteousness.

“Hunger and thirst” is a metaphor that doesn’t resonate today as it did in Jesus’ day, when food

and water were scarce and people were often hungry and thirsty. In our culture, food and water are plentiful, so we miss the urgency Jesus intended. Hungry, thirsty people work hard, urgently, to gain food. To hunger and thirst for righteousness, then, means we should urgently pursue righteousness.

Righteousness has several senses in Scripture. Paul emphasized the legal righteousness that we receive through the atoning work of Christ. That is certainly present in Matthew. He calls Jesus a “ransom for many” (20:28) and he describes the atonement itself (27:38–46). But in Matthew 5, Jesus primarily describes the personal righteousness of disciples, who put aside murder, anger, and adultery. They give to oppressors and love their enemies (vv. 22–48). Thirsty disciples also pursue the mercy, purity, and peacemaking of the next few beatitudes (vv. 7–9).

The language of hunger and thirst is well known in Scripture. God says, “Come, all you who are

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ers can stand before God the Judge on the last day. Justification wipes away all sin and guilt, whatever our level of sanctification.

thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! ... You will delight in the richest of fare” (Isa. 55:1-2). Jesus offers, “Whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst” (John 6:35).

To hunger for righteousness is to yearn for God’s rule in our lives (Matt. 6:33). It is to have a thirst for God’s Word and for the company of the godly. In Scripture, righteousness has several aspects. First, there is the personal righteousness, which we just stressed. This hunger leads us to uproot our sin by the power of the Holy Spirit and become more like Jesus. This is sanctification.

But since our quest for righteousness always falls short, we think next of the righteousness of Christ, bestowed when we believe in Him. This is justification. Justification confers legal righteousness, so believ-

Third, disciples long for social righteousness, for God’s cleansing of society. Hunger for righteousness leads disciples to promote God’s cause in business, education, politics, and more. Further, we look to the day of Jesus’ return, when He will set creation right, Satan will be overthrown, and God’s righteousness will cover the earth.

Dear reader, do you hunger for righteousness? Do you pursue holiness? Personally? In society? Or are you satisfied with a nibble of righteousness—a few moments of justice and love? Do you have a passionless routine, a dull, dutiful life, where you fit in and drift along, with the years passing like a lazy summer day? Real disciples yearn for God’s righteousness and pursue it. I hope you do, and so reach for the righteousness of our Lord.

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The Lord Jesus calls those “blessed” who hunger and thirst after righteousness. He means those who desire above all things to be entirely conformed to the mind of God. They long not so much to be rich, or wealthy, or learned, as to be holy. Blessed are all such! They shall have enough one day. They shall “awake up after God’s likeness and be satisfied.” (Psalms 17:15 - “As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.”)

~ J.C. Ryle



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