



## **The Manifesto of the King, Part 4: Blessed are the Hungry and Thirsty**

*Series: Matthew: The King and His Kingdom*

Matthew 5:1-12 (v. 6)

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### Introduction

Over the last few weeks in these beatitudes we have seen as Jesus has given to us a picture of the character of a disciple of Christ, one who has been gripped by and transformed by the grace of God. Again, it is so important to remember that in these beatitudes, as Christ is describing and setting forth a kind of character and life that is contrary to the pattern that the world promotes, that these character traits are rooted in and grow out of the powerful grace of God given to people. The characteristics, the pursuit and the conduct of true Christians that are described in the beatitudes are the result of God's work of grace and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. We must always remember that this is NOT simply a new standard of morality to pursue, but the fruit of joyful and personal submission to Christ as a person, as King and Lord, the result of which is true blessedness. Now in these first three beatitudes, we have seen Jesus describe the character of the disciple.

First He said: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. A true disciple of Christ is blessed because he is who knows that he is spiritually bankrupt and worthy only of God's eternal judgment in hell, he realizes he is utterly sinful and desperately needy of God's grace, he knows he needs a Savior, who alone is Jesus Christ, the king of the kingdom of heaven. Those who know their poverty of spirit receive the kingdom of heaven.

Then Jesus says: Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. The disciple of Christ is one who mourns over his sinfulness, who feels the weight of his rebellion against God, who grieves over personal sin that required the death of Christ for their deliverance -- for they and they alone will be comforted. They will be comforted by the forgiveness that is found in Christ at salvation and the forgiveness that flows from Christ as we fight sin and grow in Christlikeness by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Last week we saw Jesus say: Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. A disciple is one who is meek, who has rejected the pursuit of self-rule, of self-promotion and grasping for personal glory, who has rejected self-mastery to be mastered by and be submitted to God. The great promise to the meek is that they shall inherit the earth. The meek will inherit the new heavens and the new earth, we will inherit all things – the universe – in Christ. But there is more. Ultimately, the inheritance of the meek is God Himself. God in Christ is our inheritance – our incorruptible, immortal, holy, innocent, unstained, undefiled, exalted, and unfading God and Savior. So this is the character of the disciple.

If you remember, when we began a few weeks ago, I broke the beatitudes into four emphases: the character of the believer, the pursuit of the believer, and the conduct of the believer and the consequence for the believer. Now those are not hard and fast divisions, but they are helpful in seeing the progression and connection of these beatitudes. Today we move from looking at the character of the disciple to looking at the pursuit of the disciple. Jesus says: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” (Matthew 5:6, ESV) Jesus is telling us that an appetite for righteousness will mark the Christian. What does that mean and what is at the heart of Christ’s words here? Let’s consider first:

#### 1) The Precept – Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (v. 6a)

Let’s start by considering what it the righteousness that Jesus says that we should hunger and thirst for as His disciples? There are a lot of facets, a lot of aspects or parts to this righteousness, but one source. Let me show you what I mean.

The first desire of the one who has seen the depth of his bankruptcy before God, who knows the wickedness of his sin and the judgment of God against it is the longing for a righteousness that will make him right with God. How can I be made righteous in the eyes of God? The first and pressing desire of the true Christian is for a justifying righteousness that will bring us out of the condemnation of sin and make us right with God, a justifying righteousness that will spare us of the punishment that our sin deserves from the righteous and only God. The first longing of a Christian is the longing for a removal of his guilt before God, the removal of his iniquity and the defilement of his sin and the granting of a righteousness that will put him in a right standing with God.

And that is the good news of the gospel. The gospel is the good news that although we are sinners by nature, that we are deserving of eternal death by nature, that Jesus Christ, the holy Son of God, has satisfied God's wrath against our sin in His body on the cross. Through repentance and faith in His substitutionary death on the cross, we lay hold of a full and a free forgiveness. We are declared "not guilty" but even more, we receive the righteousness of Christ -- imputed righteousness, the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ -- that means His goodness, His holiness, His ability to keep the law and holy commands of God -- credited, imputed, imparted to our account. -- the perfect righteousness of Christ that we receive when we place our faith and trust in Him as our only deliverer from the penalty of sin. That's how you get saved. It is the righteousness that comes to us instantly through faith in Christ's work on the cross. Through the sacrifice of Jesus alone, nothing else added, we are made righteous in God's eyes—that's called "imputed righteousness." And that is at the heart of the gospel. (Romans 3:21–24; 2 Corinthians 5:21, ESV) So the first desire of the Christian, the first and pressing hunger and thirst is for a righteousness, a justifying righteousness which causes us to be forgiven and considered in God's eyes to be righteous and spared a punishment we know is due for our sin. And that is found only in Christ.

But after the Christian has found Christ to be His righteousness so far as forgiveness and justification are concerned, there is that hunger and thirst for practical righteousness, to be sanctified, to be progressively holier and more like Jesus Christ in character. The true Christian, the true disciple, desires not only the forgiveness of sins, but to be like Christ in practical righteousness. We desire to live out, by faith, who God has made us to be through His Son's sacrifice. The disciple desires to be righteous in his conduct, in his language, in his thoughts. He desires to be like Christ of whom Paul says that Christ has become to us: "... wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." " (1 Corinthians 1:30–31, ESV) The Christian's longing is not only to be treated as righteous by God, which comes through the atoning blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ; but that he may be actually righteous before the heart-searching God having a practical righteousness that is empowered by the work of God's grace in His soul and in his mind and heart as he abides in Christ. (John 15:4, ESV) When Jesus says, "abide in me" He is saying, "Cling to Me, stick fast to Me, make your home with me, live the life of close and intimate communion with Me through reading my word, praying to me, worshipping me, serving me, trusting fully in the salvation found only in me, obeying me. To abide in Christ is to have a continual sense of needing Him, a growing love for Him, to trust in Him not only for salvation but for the grace to live every moment of every day in a manner pleasing to the

Father. So, Jesus wants us to see that the Christian's longing is not only to be treated as righteous by God, which comes through the atoning blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ; but that he may be actually righteous before God. A righteousness that is found uniquely in Christ alone.

Then third, the desire of the Christian is not only for the personal righteousness of justification and the personal righteousness of practical righteousness -- sanctification but that the righteousness of Christ be established everywhere, It is a desire for the rule of righteousness when Christ is enthroned over all as Isaiah prophesied. (Isaiah 9:6-7, ESV)

So we see that there are many facets to the righteousness of which Jesus is speaking, the righteousness that is the desire of true disciples, for which we are to hunger and thirst. There are many facets, but only one source and that one source is Jesus Christ – Jesus the Savior, Jesus the Refiner and Purifier, and Jesus the King and Lord over all.

I believe that when we consider all of this, what Jesus is saying to us this morning is this: Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after Me, for they will be satisfied. Blessed are those who hunger after Christ and the justifying righteousness that is found alone in Him. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after Christ and the practical righteousness that comes through abiding in Him. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after Christ and the reign of righteousness that is found in Him. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness personified for they shall be satisfied, fully and truly satisfied. We will talk about that in a moment but before we do, we need to understand the intensity of the words that Jesus is using here. Hunger and thirst are intense desires, desires that crowd out and drown out every other desire and the words that Jesus uses are intense words.

In the Greek language verbs like hunger and thirst are normally followed by nouns in the genitive case. In English, genitives are usually expressed by placing the word of before a noun. When a Greek person was hungry he would literally say, "I hunger for of food." He wouldn't say, "I hunger for food" because that would mean he hungered for all the food in the world. However in Matthew 5:6 the normal use of the partitive genitive is thrown out. Instead the accusative case is used, which makes the verse read, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after all righteousness." I know that this sounds technical but it makes all of the difference in

the world. Blessed are those who don't want just a little of Jesus, just the benefits of Jesus, but blessed are those who hunger and thirst for the fullness of Jesus Christ and His righteousness. Nothing else can satisfy them. They must have all of Christ or die.

As well, hunger and thirst are not passing desires. When you are hungry or thirsty, it doesn't just go away. It isn't a short-lived, passing desire. It is not a fad or a trend. It does not go away until it is satisfied. Nor are hunger and thirst passive desires. In other words, hunger and thirst dominate every other desire.

A book written by Major Vivian Gilbert called *The Romance of the Last Crusade* (N.Y.: D. Appleton & Co., 1927) describes the British liberation of Palestine in World War I. Dr. E.M. Blaiklock related part of it in a magazine article and it gives a great picture of what I am talking about: "Driving up from Beersheba, a combined force of British, Australians and New Zealanders were pressing on the rear of the Turkish retreat over arid desert. The attack out-distanced its water-carrying camel train. Water bottles were empty. The sun was scorching and vultures were circling waiting for someone to drop.

"Our heads ached,' writes Gilbert, 'and our eyes became bloodshot and dim in the blinding glare.... Our tongues began to swell ... our lips turned a purplish black and burst ....' Those who dropped out of the column were never seen again, but the desperate force battled on to Sheria. There were wells at Sheria, and had they been unable to take the place by nightfall, thousands were doomed to die of thirst. 'We fought that day,' writes Gilbert, 'as men fight for their lives.... We entered Sheria station on the heels of the retreating Turks. The first objects which met our view were the great stone cisterns full of cold, clear, drinking water. In the still night air the sound of water running into the tanks could be distinctly heard, maddening in its nearness; yet not a man murmured when orders were given for the battalions to fall in, two deep, facing the cisterns.'

"He describes the stern priorities: the wounded, those on guard duty, then company by company. It took four hours before the last man had his drink of water, and in all that time they had been standing 20 feet from a low stone wall, on the other side of which were thousands of gallons of water.

"I believe," Major Gilbert concludes, "that we all learned our first real Bible lesson on that march from Beersheba to Sheria wells." Blaiklock added, "If such were our thirst for God, for righteousness, for His will in our life, a consuming, all-embracing, preoccupying desire, how rich in the fruits of the Spirit would we be" ("New Light on Bible Imagery: Water," Eternity [August, 1966], pp. 27-28).

Does that describe you beloved? What do you hunger and thirst for? What must you have or die? Is it Jesus Christ? Because here's the thing, what you hunger and thirst for declares the character of your heart. What you long for and desire most reveals the makeup of your heart. Your appetites are an insight to your heart. This beatitude cuts through all the junk to get right to the heart of things. It makes us be honest with ourselves and with God. What are the obstacles to hungering and thirsting for Christ?

The truth is that many, even in the church, try to find satisfaction in the wrong places. Violence, excitement, anger, erotica, materialism, money, prestige, comfort -- If they hold the supreme desire of your heart, then you are an idolator, because those things have become your god and you will never be satisfied. In fact, they stifle a hunger for Christ.

But what about seemingly Christian things that we hunger and thirst for? Maybe it is "spiritual things". Maybe your chief desire is spiritual maturity, spiritual power, witnessing skills, academic knowledge, to have a reputation as someone who is holy and spiritual, the benefits of being in a church, acceptance with a certain group within the church, being known as a selfless servant, a position or a title, spiritual excitement and a sense of adventure, a good name and respectable family... The motivations can be endless. Those things cannot satisfy our souls. We are to hunger and thirst after THE righteousness of God, God Himself, Jesus Christ His Son. Do you see it?

Martyn Lloyd Jones rightly observes, "There are large numbers of people in the Christian church who seem to spend the whole of their life seeking something which they can never find, seeking for some kind of happiness and blessedness. They go round from meeting to meeting, and convention to convention, (let me add here preacher to preacher, book to book, and fad to fad) always hoping they are going to get this wonderful thing, this experience that is going to fill them with joy, and flood them with some ecstasy. They see that other people have had it, but

they themselves do not seem to get it. So they seek it and covet it, always hungering and thirsting; but they never get it.” Only when we hunger and thirst after Christ will we be satisfied.

Even some people, who seem to be earnest about seeking after righteousness, seek after the wrong kind of righteousness. Too many professing Christians seek for the self-righteousness of legalism – righteousness by way of extra-biblical and guilt driven rules, rules we make up that we think will earn favor with God or show how spiritual we are; the theoretical, hypothetical, imaginary righteousness of mysticism – imagining and defining God according to our fallen reason, the talk of hyper-spiritual experience; or the righteous by subtraction of asceticism – the guilt driven subtraction of certain things so as to be more holy, a self-imposed abstinence from good things in order to demonstrate greater devotion and making others feel guilty for not doing the same. None of these things satisfy. They are broken cisterns that hold no water. Jeremiah lamented in Jer. 2: (Jeremiah 2:12–13, ESV) We must hunger and thirst after the right kind of righteousness, the righteousness that is found in Christ alone, or we will never be satisfied. Only Christ do we find the justifying righteousness that delivers us for all eternity and fulfills completely the law of God; only in Christ do we find the practical righteousness that comes from abiding in Him as Christ, by His grace, reproduces His own life in us; and only in Christ will we find the rule of Christ when He is revealed from heaven and reigns in righteousness over all creation. Only in Him can we find that satisfaction.

What does this hungering and thirsting look like? Consider the words of David in Psalm 63:1-5. Here’s what David is saying. There is in knowing God a richness, a sumptuousness, a fullness of soul filling joy that comes from desiring and pursuing God. David hungered and thirsted for God. Or consider Paul. Paul knew the Lord and yet he hungered continually for Him. (Philippians 3:8–14, ESV) I want to know Christ was the call of Paul’s heart, a hunger and thirst that gripped his soul.

In David and Paul we see a picture of intense, desperate hunger and thirst for God, a hungering and thirsting within their souls, an appetite for God that could never be filled. They were insatiable in their desire for God. Are you?

Cornelius Plantinga, who is Dean of the Chapel at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, warns that some Christians are so stuffed with junk, they don’t want the bread of life. He says: I think a lot of people, including a lot of Christians, are secretly tired of God. They hear sermons

about God with half a mind. They launch prayers toward God with half a heart. They sing hymns to God with words they cannot recount...nobody should underestimate the challenge of making God real. A good sermon may have to get through layers of bumper sticker piety, billboard piety, radio and television piety. It must penetrate people who have been so stuffed with the good news of God that the news no longer sounds to them very good or very new. And therefore our hunger has been dulled. And therefore our worship has shriveled. Those who are living by another appetite will never know the satisfaction of God.

Beloved, spiritual hunger and thirst are the evidence of spiritual life. What if we don't have this hunger and thirst--this overwhelming, intense, all-consuming, painful hunger and thirst? It could mean that we are dead. Dead people don't hunger. Or it could mean we are sick, because sick people don't hunger either. Let me assure you, hungering and thirsting is a sign of life and health. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, after righteousness personified, Jesus Christ, for they have this promise...they shall be satisfied.

2) The Promise – For they shall be satisfied (v. 6b) Jesus makes the promise that if we hunger and thirst for Christ and His righteousness, we will be satisfied. Christ will fill us. We will be satisfied now, in this age, and in the age to come. In hungering and thirsting after Christ right now, we will find satisfaction and assurance in a full and a free salvation that can only be provided by His death in our place and His resurrection – I need look nowhere else for salvation and rescue. In hungering and thirsting after Christ right now, we find satisfaction and assurance in the ongoing work of Christ to fashion us more and more into His image as we abide in Him who is our sanctification – I need look for no other secret, no other way of sanctification than the words of Christ applied to my heart by the Spirit of Christ. In hungering and thirsting after Christ and His righteousness right now, longing for His reign to begin and His glory to be revealed, we will be satisfied in the age to come as “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:10–11, ESV)

The root meaning of the word "satisfied" has to do with the place where the green grass grows and animals graze. The idea is to satisfy with food, to be fed full, and completely satisfied. But here's the thing, the glorious paradox that we need to see here. In order to stay satisfied, what must the cattle do? Keep eating. Being satisfied, being filled is an unquenchable satisfaction. It is the same for us. The way we stay satisfied is to continue to hunger and thirst and feed on Christ. Our hunger increases and intensifies in the very act of being satisfied.

Let me give you an example. I'm satisfied when I kiss my wife, but I am not satisfied with only one kiss. The satisfaction one kiss provides also increases my desire for more of the same. That is a picture of what the Christian's hunger and thirst is like--the more we are filled with the satisfaction of Christ's righteousness the more we desire it. The more of Christ I get, the more I want.

### 3) Evidences of hungering and thirsting for Christ and His righteousness.

How can you tell if you are hungering and thirsting for Christ, for the righteousness of God? If we are hungering and thirsting after righteousness, we will make use of the means of grace. We will be in church, listening to the preaching of the word attentively, worshipping Him meaningfully, serve Him faithfully, submit to Him joyfully, obey Him unreservedly. We will read the word of God hungrily, thirst for the communion of prayer.

We will discipline our lives and prioritize our life activities in such a way that we will eliminate the junk that interferes with the pursuit of Christ. We will clean the junk out of our lives, in other words. Let me say one thing, so that I am not misunderstood here. It is not that there can be no other legitimate desires or no other legitimate joys in your life. Some people take a call to hunger and thirst for Christ and try to turn themselves and others into a monk...that is not the idea. We can trust that Christ will show us, through His Word and by His Spirit what needs to be forsaken, what needs to be put away, even perhaps some good things. The point is that all other legitimate joys and desires find their true meaning and take their right place in relationship to an overarching hunger and thirsting for Christ. It is that Christ is the center of it all – your life, motives, activities, purposes, family, work – all of it. While you may enjoy other legitimate gifts and joys and desires, the only thing that can satisfy your soul completely is God in Christ. And the great promise of Psalm 91 is this:(Psalm 91:14–16, ESV)

What if you find you find no real hunger, no real thirst for Christ in your soul? Oh beloved, cry out to the Lord. "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!" (Psalm 139:23–24, ESV) If you need to be saved, if you need to know your sins fully washed away by the blood of Christ, cry out to God to save you, repent of your sins and trust in Christ and His work on the

cross and find the soul satisfaction of salvation. If you know yourself a child of God and your hunger and thirst for Christ is fading, ask God to show you what is killing your appetite for Christ and feed your soul with the things of Christ. Call upon the Lord Jesus to stir your desire.

In Isaiah 55, speaking for the Lord, Isaiah says (Isaiah 55:1–3a, ESV) Bring your appetite and be satisfied.

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