

and thirst for righteousness, and that is, we long for the day when we will be done with sin altogether. In justification we are freed from the **power of sin**, in sanctification we are progressively freed from the **pollution of sin**, and in heaven we will be freed from the **presence of sin**.

There is a day coming when not only the believer will be perfected in body and soul to be with His Lord forever, but also he will live in a world where only righteousness dwells, and his hunger and thirst will then be perfectly satisfied. Listen to what the Scriptures say about it:

Revelation 7:16 *"They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat."*

1 John 3:2 *"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."*

Psalms 17:15 *"As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness."*

What a prospect awaits those who hunger and thirst for righteousness! Let me end with these questions put to us by Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "Is it the greatest desire in your life? Is it the deepest longing of your being? Can you say quite honestly and truly that you desire above everything else in this world truly to know God and to be like the Lord Jesus Christ, to be rid of self in every shape and form, and to live only, always and entirely to His glory and to His honor?"

There may be some of you who will feel discouraged, for you see so little of growth in righteousness and at times doubt if you are a believer. Then take heart, my friend, the promise of satisfaction is not made to those who have attained, but to those who are hungering and thirsting for righteousness! "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst for righteousness: for they shall be filled." Amen.

*Kuldip Gangar, Radio Pastor*

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**BANNER OF TRUTH RADIO BROADCAST**

*Radio Ministry of the FREE REFORMED CHURCHES of North America*

*Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee that it may be displayed because of the truth. (Psalm 60:4)*



### BLESSED ARE THEY THAT HUNGER AND THIRST

Coming back now to our series on the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount, we are looking at the fourth beatitude, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." [Matthew 5:6] In our western culture, these words do not convey what they would have to a man living in Palestine. For in that land most people lived below poverty level. In such a land, water is a precious commodity, so to hunger and thirst spoke of raging pangs suffered by people who will starve unless their need is met. This describes the spiritual need of those who are the subject of the Spirit's work. They now long to be right with God and to be conformed to His likeness.

Now, beloved, it is possible for a person to be empty and yet not be hungering or thirsting. There are many who attend church regularly and go through all the motions of religion, yet they are empty. They have no sense of need, no passion for God. This was certainly the case with the church in Laodicea. These people did not even know they were empty, yet they were. One other thing, let us note, is that the verse speaks of 'hungering and thirsting' which implies they are *active* not passive. All men are born empty of this righteousness, yet cannot be described as hungering or thirsting, for they are dead in their trespasses and sins. It is only one who is born of the Spirit who now sees his need and longs for this righteousness. Only those who are awakened by the Spirit to see their sin and misery long to obtain a righteousness to give them standing before God, and a conformity to His image. Many are empty but do not actively hunger and thirst to be filled. Are you hungering and thirsting? Have you seen your sins and misery? Do you long to be made right with God? Do you long to be conformed to Christ's image? If so, then the Spirit is at work in you.

This active hungering and thirsting for righteousness is a sign of life and vitality. Just as the baby cries for its mother's milk when hungry, so a child of God cries for righteousness. Let us hear the Scriptures, which describe this longing:

Psalms 42:1 *"As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?"*

Psalm 63:1 *“O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is;”*

Psalm 84:2 *“My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.”*

1 Peter 2:2 *“As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:”*

One of the signs of decline in Christianity is this lack of hungering and thirsting in the church of today. This is evidenced by dwindling numbers in the evening services. Many churches have given up having an evening service. Others are more interested in being ‘amused’ rather than ‘musing’ on the Word of God. The words of Job and David would not be upon many lips today:

Job 23:12 *“Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.”*

Psalm 19:10 *“More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.”*

Having considered our intense desire, let us look at what this righteousness is for which we seek. There are three aspects to this righteousness for which a child of God hungers. The first is what is often termed **legal righteousness**. This is what every sinner who is awakened to his sin and misery stands in need of. He comes to see that he has fallen short of the glory of God; and is worthy only of His wrath. Men do not wish to hear this truth, for it is offensive to them, but it is the truth still. Unless we obtain a perfect righteousness, we shall never be right with God or have fellowship with Him. Many however have no desire for such fellowship, and would rather be done with God. However the opposite of being right with God is to suffer His eternal wrath for the sins we have committed, and things we have left undone. The only way a sinner can stand legally right with God is through the **perfect righteousness** of Jesus Christ which He worked out for us while He lived on earth by His perfect obedience and by His sufferings and death for sinners. This righteousness we receive by faith in Jesus Christ. Our sins are transferred to Him, and His righteousness to us.

2 Corinthians 5:21 *“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”*

The second aspect of this righteousness is that we not only have righteousness placed to our account by it being imputed to us; we are also progressively made righteousness by Christ dwelling in us by His Spirit. There are many that claim to be Christians who have no desire to be holy. These people are self-deceived, for Christ saves none whom He does not make holy. This is imparted righteousness, which Christ works in His people by His Spirit. A child of God hungers to be conformed to Him who died for him. Is this passion to be conformed to Christ something that would characterize

your walk? Do you daily resist sin and put on righteousness? Do you see the fruits of the Spirit in your life?

As C.H. Spurgeon wrote, “Another proof of the conquest of a soul for Christ will be found in a real change of life. If the man does not live differently from what he did before, both at home and abroad, his repentance needs to be repented of, and his conversion is a fiction”. We are not only saved by grace, we are also saved unto good works.

Ephesians 2:8-10 *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: <sup>9</sup> Not of works, lest any man should boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”*

The third aspect of righteousness is that **we affect society**. We are said to be the salt and light of the world. Therefore if we are new creatures in Christ Jesus, we will long to see His commandments obeyed in society. John Stott writes, “For biblical righteousness is more than a private and personal affair; it includes social righteousness as well. And social righteousness, as we learn from the law and the prophets, is concerned with seeking man’s liberation from oppression, together with the promotion of civil rights, justice in the law courts, integrity in business dealings and honor in home and family affairs”. Luther said, ‘If you cannot make the world completely pious, then do what you can.’”

This righteousness then has these three aspects. It is righteousness which is received by faith, to give us right standing before God. It is the righteousness which is worked in us by His Spirit progressively as long as we live. It is a righteousness that will be manifested in all relations of life, in society and in the world.

As John Blanchard points out there is a paradox in this verse. On the one hand we are told we shall be filled, yet the verb is a present active participle, which implies that the hunger and thirst continues throughout life. He writes: “The Christian is rather like a high-jumper who with every successful leap asks the bar to be set even higher, then longs to clear it again. In a way beyond our understanding, but not beyond our experience, the spiritual hungering and thirsting of which Jesus speaks in this beatitude increases in the very act of being satisfied. The more the Christian is filled, the more he hungers and thirsts”. Paul writes about this in 2 Corinthians 3:18, *“But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”*

The reason we go on hungering and thirsting is that in this life we never arrive at perfection. It is true that as to our standing before God we are perfectly righteous by the imputed righteousness of Christ; but in terms of sanctification, we are always imperfect in this life, and therefore need to pursue holiness all our days. But there is another sense in which we hunger