



Matthew 5:6

6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Reflection

Today we continue to work our way through the Beatitudes, which is just a Latin word meaning 'blessing.' The Beatitudes are the introduction to arguably Jesus' most famous teaching, the Sermon on the Mount, which

takes up chapters 5, 6 and 7 of Matthew's gospel. They're probably the second most famous part of his sermon, second only to the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6 when Jesus teaches his disciples and us how to pray. In the Beatitudes, Jesus has been teaching us about the kingdom of God and how radically different it is to the kingdom of this world. And through his preaching Jesus is turning the world on its head.

In the first three verses of his sermon he's told us to be poor, to mourn, to be meek and this morning he's telling us to hunger and thirst. Be poor, mourn, be meek, hunger and thirst ... are you catching a theme here? Not rich, celebrating, on top of the world and satisfied; but poor, in mourning, meek, and hungry and thirsting. Not self-sufficient, and independent, living your life without refer-

ence to God, but living life in utter dependency on him. In other words not living blindly, deceived into thinking that you're the centre of this world, that you're the king over your own life. But seeing clearly, and living as members of the kingdom of God, acknowledging the gracious rule and reign and provision of Jesus over your life. The two don't overlay well, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world, because they're black and white, they're opposites, you're king or Jesus is king, and when you try and overlay the two, when you try to have a foot in both camps, a foot in the church and a foot in this world; well it never ends well.

And we've seen a powerful logic to Jesus' sermon so far. He began by saying that to enter the kingdom of heaven you need to be poor in spirit, you need to acknowledge that you're

spiritually bankrupt, unable to do anything to merit salvation, so deep in sin that only the gracious gift of God through what Jesus did on the cross can save you. And when you realise you're poor in spirit, spiritually bankrupt, you mourn. You mourn at your personal sin, and you mourn at the state of the world – which was the second verse of Jesus' sermon. And mourning at your personal sin and your inability to live a life worthy of your God produces meekness of character, it produces humility – which is the third verse of Jesus' sermon. And out of being meek and so consciousness of your sin comes a strong longing to live a better life, a life increasing free of sin, a life that is increasingly righteous. Which brings us to the fourth verse of Jesus's sermon, our passage today. Matthew 5:6,

6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

But before we look at this in detail let's start by defining the term 'righteousness.' It's one of those Christian words, its Christian jargon that isn't really used in mainstream language anymore. The closest you might have heard is 'self-righteous' which has all sorts of negative connotations and is almost the complete opposite to the term 'righteousness' in the bible. 'Righteousness' is a broad term in the bible which at its most basic level means 'right with God.' You can break it down a little further by thinking of it in terms of being right with God in a legal sense, in a moral sense and in a social sense. In the legal sense, we're only right with God through what Jesus did for us on the cross. He made us right with

God by giving us his righteousness. That's why the cross is often called the great exchange, we're sinful, he's perfect, because of our sin we should have died, but he was exchanged for us, he died in our place, so through his death, our sins were paid for, and his righteousness was credited to us. So that's the legal sense of righteousness, our debts are paid in fully by Jesus, but Matthew doesn't use the word that way in his gospel. When Matthew uses righteousness he's thinking more of the moral and social sense, he means the right actions part of the right relationship with God. He means the inner righteousness of our hearts, minds and motives that result in us living rightly in our world and wanting to see righteousness characterise the wider communities that we live in. And as we've already said, a heart that is mourning personal sin and the sin it sees in the world around

us is also a heart that wants to take the fight up to sin by living righteously and promoting righteousness in the world.

And so to hunger and thirst for righteousness is to desperately strive, to crave ever increasingly, obedience to God in your own life but also in the world around you. Which means doing anything you can to speed up the work of the Holy Spirit in your life so you increasingly resemble Jesus in the way you think, and act and live. And it also means a deep and heart felt desire that our society should uphold everything that God upholds including justice, peace, and human rights, and care for the marginalised, the poor, widows, the elderly and the oppressed.

And Jesus promises that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, who desire it

above all else, will be blessed because they will be filled to overflowing with it, they will be fully satisfied. The Greek word that sits underneath the English translation of 'filled' is actually far more dynamic – it has the sense of 'filled to overbrimming.' If you hunger and thirst for righteousness in your heart the Holy Spirit will give it to you abundantly – so hold on, because it will be quite a ride if that's your prayer. And if you hunger and thirst for righteousness for this world, well Jesus promises that it is coming, perhaps in part through Christian efforts in our world down throughout the ages – so get involved – but certainly fully and finally when Jesus returns and sets everything right. On that day the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters fill the sea and there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things will have

passed away. In other words, righteousness will abound.

Think

But it's hard to hunger and thirst, if you're already full. Are you full? Are you satisfied? Are you satisfied with the success you're having in your career, with your hobbies and pursuits and all the fun you have outside or work, or with your family? These are all good gifts from God but they aren't meant to replace our desire for him. Are you seeking first the kingdom of this world instead of seeking first the kingdom of God? Jesus promises that if you hunger and thirst for righteousness you will be filled but if you hunger and thirst for the things of this world you will never be satisfied.

Pray

So please consider right now the deepest motivations of your heart. What's driving you, what do you desire most? And if there is something in God's place, if you are seeking something or someone ahead of him then pray to him this morning and ask for his forgiveness and ask for his help to reorder the things you love so that he is, and always remains your first and most precious love.

And tomorrow, Jesus' blessings continue. I'll see you then.