

# The Sermon on the Mount: A Reformed Exposition

## Chapter 5: Hungering and Thirsting After Righteousness

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Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled (Mt. 5:6).

Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh (Lk. 6:21).

Those who are made aware of their spiritual poverty—who mourn over sin and are meek before God—hunger and thirst after righteousness. The first three beatitudes have focused our attention upon the person who has been awakened to his spiritual condition. Such a man understands that he is a filthy sinner before God. He realizes his spiritual bankruptcy and assumes a position of abasement and humility before a thrice holy God. He knows that, in and of himself, his case is hopeless before Jehovah. Therefore, he has a strong hunger and thirst after righteousness. He can never rest until that hunger and thirst is satisfied by Jesus Christ. Thus, we see once again that there is a spiritual progression in the beatitudes. They logically follow one another. “Each step leads to the next and presupposes the one that has gone before.”<sup>1</sup> Obviously, the man who truly understands the truth concerning himself, who acknowledges his sin, who admits and confesses his guilt, who understands who God is, will not stop there, but will seek relief from his spiritual hunger. That is what this beatitude is all about.

### Spiritual Hungering and Thirsting

What does Jesus mean when He refers to hunger and thirst? These are metaphors for a very strong desire; indeed a desire so strong and dedicated it is an obsession. We understand this point better when we consider these terms in their original cultural context. It is hard for modern Americans to relate to the potency of these words for we have not really experienced excruciating hunger or desperate thirst. America is suffering from an obesity crisis and water is available at any tap. In the days of Jesus, however, poverty was common and the standard of living was quite low. A common laborer made very little money and would eat meat with a meal, at best, only once a week. This situation describes times when crops were good. If the crops were poor or failed, people experienced real hunger; a hunger that we scarcely understand. For example, during WWII in both Nazi and Soviet concentration camps starvation was so severe that imprisoned soldiers engaged in cannibalism and ate rats, insects, worms, leaves and grass.

In the Middle East, water is a scarce commodity. If a man was on a journey and ran out of water, he would have to tough it out and suffer an excruciating thirst until he reached the next oasis, town, well or stream. In the hot, dusty climate of Israel with the hot summer sun upon his

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<sup>1</sup> John R. W. Stott, *Christian Counter Culture*, 46.

head, such a man would be obsessed with water. In his mind at that point everything would be relatively unimportant except water.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, as we contemplate this hunger and thirst, let us not confuse our moderate hunger as lunch approaches or our desire for iced tea on a hot summer afternoon with this kind of want. We are discussing the hunger of a starving man and the thirst of man who has run out of water in the desert.

This vehement desire is rooted in the spiritual knowledge that righteousness is something we desperately need. It flows from a consciousness that we do not have an acceptable, adequate, or saving righteousness of our own. Once again, we observe our Lord teaching a doctrine that fundamentally contradicts the instruction of the religious leaders at that time. The Jews believed that they could achieve their own righteousness by an *outward* obedience to the law. It was not something to be sought as a gift of divine grace, but something to be achieved by self-effort. Moreover, the Jews eagerly desired the blessings of the Messianic kingdom as they pictured it. They craved deliverance from Rome, wealth, power, the world's respect, and a carnal dominion. But Christ ignores these triumphalist external blessings and describes the very essence of what is necessary to become a Christian and live as a Christian: an exceptional desire for righteousness. Do you have a strong inner craving for righteousness? Is obtaining the righteousness of which Jesus speaks a central obsession of your life? If it is not, then it is obvious that you are not poor in spirit. You have not mourned over your sin and guilt. Neither have you assumed a position of humility before God. "If this verse is to you one of the most blessed statements of the whole of Scripture, you can be quite certain you are a Christian; if it is not, then you had better examine the foundations again."<sup>3</sup>

## The Righteousness Christians Crave

What does our Lord mean by the term righteousness? A proper understanding of this word is crucial for the meaning of this beatitude. Some commentators insist that the word refers only to the righteousness associated with sanctification. They argue that Jesus is already addressing disciples or people who belong to Him. Others (e.g., Lenski) argue that the term righteousness is always forensic or declarative in nature and, thus, the Savior must only be speaking about the righteousness of justification. The best manner of understanding this term is to see how it was used in the Old Testament, especially in the Messianic prophecies. When this is done, we see that the word is used of salvation in a very comprehensive sense, which includes both justification and sanctification.

Note how the Old Testament frequently defines righteousness in terms of salvation. "Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness" (Dan. 9:24). Edward J. Young writes, "Together with the taking away or removal of sin there is a positive unfolding of salvation. Righteousness is to be brought in by God through the Messiah.

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<sup>2</sup> Thirst as an expression of vehement desire is found in the Old Testament. The psalmist writes, "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my food day and night, while they continually say to me, where is your God?" (Ps. 42:1-3). "O God, you are my God; early will I seek You; my soul thirsts for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water" (Ps. 63:1). While David writes of a strong thirst for God, Jesus speaks of a very strong desire for righteousness.

<sup>3</sup> D. Martyn-Lloyd Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 1:74.

This righteousness is not mere prosperity, nor in any sense of a merely external nature. It is a righteousness that comes from God (Ps. 85:11-13; Isa. 51:5-8)...it is similar to the everlasting salvation of Isaiah 45:17 and the eternal inheritance of Isa. 60:21; and corresponds (in its heavenly character of everlasting) to the eternity of the Messianic Kingdom (2:44; 7:18, 27). It therefore comprises both external and internal righteousness.”<sup>4</sup> “Rain down, you heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness; let the earth open, let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together. I, the Lord, have created it” (Isa. 45:8). “I will bring My righteousness near, it shall not be far off; My salvation shall not linger. And I will place salvation in Zion, for Israel My glory” (Isa. 46:13). “My righteousness is near, My salvation is about to come, and My righteousness to be revealed” (Isa. 56:1). “Here the two terms, righteousness and salvation, are practically synonymous. The salvation is spiritual, characterized by righteousness.”<sup>5</sup> “For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness” (Isa. 61:10). “Salvation is righteousness, for in the salvation of man the righteousness of God is revealed.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, when we seek righteousness we are seeking it in a comprehensive way. As Jesus Himself said in the same sermon: “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Mt. 6:33). The righteousness that believers are to hunger and thirst after includes the following.

First, there is legal righteousness where a sinner is justified before God. The person who is poor in spirit knows that “there is none righteous, no not one” (Rom. 3:10). He knows that by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in God’s sight (Rom. 3:20). He understands that he has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). Therefore, he assumes a position of humility before God and counts all his supposedly good deeds as nothing but foul, sin-stained rubbish. Because he knows that he is guilty of sin in thought, word and deed, he craves and seeks “the righteousness which is from God by faith” (Phil. 3:9). Thus, by faith he grasps Jesus Christ’s perfect righteousness.

When a person acknowledges his sin and believes in Christ, all of his sins, past, present and future are imputed to Jesus on the cross. “He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.... And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:5, 6). Our Lord’s atoning death was substitutionary. That is, He suffered and died to eliminate our guilt. He bore the punishment of sin that we deserved. He “redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13). “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin” (Rom. 4:7-8).

When a man trusts in Christ he also receives the gift of Christ’s perfect righteousness (i.e. His obedience to the law of God and His fulfilling of the covenant of works). This righteousness is crucial to our salvation because God’s moral law not only prohibits sin, but also requires sinless perfection. The Savior not only washed away our sins by His blood, but He also gave us (by imputation) the perfect positive righteousness that we need to come into God’s presence and have fellowship with Him. “Therefore, as the offense of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation, even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life” (Rom. 5:18-19, KJV). “But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—that, as it is

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<sup>4</sup> Edward J. Young, *Daniel* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1949] 1972), 199-200.

<sup>5</sup> Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 3:310.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

written, ‘He who glories, let him glory in the LORD’” (1 Cor. 1:30). “When we stand before the judgment-seat of God, Christ is our righteousness. He answers for us; he presents his own infinite merit as the all sufficient reason for our justification.”<sup>7</sup> Because the perfect righteousness of Christ is ours, God gives us the reward of eternal life. Jesus came to fulfill all righteousness (Mt. 3:15). He indeed is “the LORD our righteousness” (Jer. 23:6).

We see how the doctrine of our absolute need of the perfect righteousness of Christ logically follows the preceding beatitudes. The starting point of discipleship, of the whole Christian life begins with a strong desire rooted in our need of the perfect righteousness of the Savior. This teaching is very humbling to man. “The faith through which we obtain justification involves an acknowledgement of the reality and exceeding evil of our sin, and of our own utter helplessness. We came to God confessing that the robe of our personal character is but ‘filthy rags,’ in which we dare not stand in His sight; and we receive from Him the ample, stainless, fragrant robe of the Redeemer’s righteousness.”<sup>8</sup> This imagery is set forth beautifully in Zechariah, “Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and was standing before the Angel. Then He answered and spoke to those who stood before Him, saying, ‘Take away the filthy garments from him.’ He said, ‘See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will cloth you with rich robes’” (3:3-4). This is an excellent picture of double imputation. God removes our filthy garments by the blood of Christ. He pardons our sins and removes our guilt. Then God makes us fit and presentable for heaven by imputing to us the Savior’s righteousness. Only Christ’s imputed righteousness makes us worthy to appear before God. Jesus sets us free from condemnation and gives us the right to eternal blessedness.

Thus, we see that the beatitudes do contain the gospel. This beatitude sets forth the great charter for every soul that knows its own bankruptcy and is starving for a righteousness that can reconcile the sinner with God. Deep down, everyone knows that God is righteous and we are not (Rom. 3:10, 20, 23). Thus, everyone must come to terms with this beatitude. There are really only two alternatives before us. We can attempt to build or establish our own righteousness by doing good works, by attempting to keep God’s law and by being diligent with various religious observations. This first option is the path of the vast majority of people: Jews, Mohammedans, Roman Catholics and all apostate forms of Christianity. This is the way of the natural man, the person who does not have the Holy Spirit. As Paul said of the Jews, “Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law.... For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Rom. 9:31, 32; 10:3, 4). We see that it is crucial that, in the area of justification, people seek after the proper kind of righteousness, a righteousness objective to the sinner. Otherwise, everything is lost.

The other path, which is the only true way, is to receive the righteousness of Christ as a free gift through the instrument of faith. This is the only true way for all those who are poor in spirit; who mourn over their sins and their condition; who humbly acknowledge that all their righteous acts are like filthy rags; who seek God’s judicial verdict of acquittal; and who abandon all hope in everything except the righteousness of Christ. From start to finish salvation is entirely by grace. “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9).

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<sup>7</sup> Charles Hodge, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1857, 59] 1974), 27.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Johnstone, *Lectures on the Book of Philippians* (Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, [1875] 1977), 246.

This raises a very important question. Do you have spiritual hunger for Christ and His righteousness? If you do not have a strong hunger and thirst for Jesus and His salvation then obviously you will not be filled. Our Lord invites all to His banquet table, but only those who know they are sick will seek out a physician (cf. Mt. 9:12; Mk: 2:17; Lk. 5:31). The only one who can produce this blessed hunger is the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God raises our dead hearts and draws us to Christ. “A dead man cannot hunger. Hunger proceeds from life. The first thing the child does when it is born, is to hunger after the breast. Spiritual hunger follows upon the new birth (1 Peter 2:2).”<sup>9</sup> Although this Spirit-induced hunger causes pain and distress, yet that pain is soon satisfied by Christ. “Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price” (Isa. 55:1).

Second, Christians are to hunger and thirst for an inward sanctifying righteousness. Although justification and sanctification are never to be mixed, merged or confused, they also must never be completely severed as if one could exist without the other. The Holy Spirit who changes our hearts from stone to flesh and draws us to Christ for justification also gives us a craving for inward righteousness or holiness. This beatitude describes a *dual* experience. There is that initial conversion experience where a sinner hungers and thirsts after Jesus and His imputed righteousness. There also is the continuous yearning for the impartation of righteousness. Like a newborn the converted sinner strongly desires to grow in grace, to more and more be conformed to the image of Christ. A hungering and thirsting after inherent righteousness involves a number of things.

It involves a hatred of the world and our old man, or the person we were before we were born again. The person who is poor in spirit and mourns over his sins has a Spirit-given loathing of this world and his old life of sin. Because he now understands the evil, sin and vanity of this world, he longs to be free of its evil influence over him. “He wants to get away from this power that drags him down in spite of himself, that ‘law in his members’ of which Paul speaks in Romans vii. He wants to be free from the power and the tyranny and the thralldom of sin.”<sup>10</sup> If a man does not hate this present evil age and does not hate what he was in his old unregenerate-unconverted state, then he cannot have a strong hunger and thirst for personal righteousness. Thus, we see that a strong desire for righteousness must be accompanied by a holy hatred of sin. A man who loves his sin will not forsake it. The genuine disciple of Jesus hates sin and completely hates his fleshly desires for it. When he examines himself and discovers that there are sinful things that he is attracted to and tempted to do, he hungers and thirsts for a further deliverance from the pollution of sin. “Ye that love the LORD, hate evil” (Ps. 97:10).

It involves a hungering and thirsting after spiritual things that increase personal godliness. There is a strong hunger for feasting upon the Word of God. Jesus prayed for His people saying, “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth” (Jn. 17:17). The Holy Spirit subdues our sin and increases our personal righteousness over time. This process, however, occurs through means. He works upon our conscious life through the Bible. If we hunger and thirst for righteousness, then we must frequently drink the pure milk of the word that we may grow thereby (1 Pet. 2:2). One of the great problems with the Jews of Jesus’ day was that they had forsaken the Scriptures as a guide for personal holiness relying instead on man-made rules and regulations. Thus, they abandoned obedience to God’s Word as a means of personal holiness

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas Watson, *The Beatitudes*, 123.

<sup>10</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 1:78.

for obedience to man's *outward* rules. Not only was their doctrine of salvation completely heretical, but their concept of sanctification was also legalistic and unprofitable.

Bible-believing Christians must understand that spiritual growth can only occur when there is a heartfelt obedience to what God's Word teaches. Since the standard of righteousness is particularly focused upon God's moral law, it makes sense for Christians to meditate upon God's moral law as a means of sanctification. Watson notes that "though the moral law is not a Christ to justify us, yet it is a rule to instruct us.... The law of God is a hedge to keep us within the bounds of sobriety and piety."<sup>11</sup> Dick adds, "The purity of the law appears from its forbidding sin in all its modifications, in its most refined as well as in its grossest forms; the taint of the mind as well as the pollution of the body; the secret approbation of sin, as well as the external act, the transient look of desire, the almost unperceived irregular motion."<sup>12</sup> Paul says, "Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good" (Rom. 7:12).

The law of God defines righteousness. It also defines sin ("Sin is the transgression of the law," 1 Jn. 3:4). It tells us what behavior must be removed from our lives and it tells us what is good or ethical. Righteousness is not merely a negation of bad behavior, but also is a replacing of unbiblical behavior with good works that are pleasing to God. If we are serious about seeking righteousness, then we need to study the moral law and the inspired New Covenant applications of that law and apply them to our lives. Christians need to meditate on Scripture in order to die unto sin and live unto God. Thus the psalmist declared, "How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word.... Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.... I will meditate on Your precepts, and contemplate Your ways. I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word.... Teach me, O LORD, the way of Your statutes, and I shall keep it to the end. Give me understanding, and I shall keep Your law; indeed I will observe it with my whole heart" (Ps. 119:9, 11, 15, 16, 33, 34).

This point is very important for if we do not seek righteousness as it relates to our sanctification in God's Word, then we'll find ourselves following an unbiblical form of humanistic pietism. Because of the influence of dispensationalism (which teaches that the whole Old Testament law including the ten commandments was for the Jews only or a past dispensation) and the Charismatic movement (which often seeks truth not in Scripture but in a personal experience or direct revelation), the yearning for righteousness of which Christ speaks has been abandoned by many professing Christians and replaced with mysticism or an antinomian pietism. Instead of carefully studying God's Word and meditating on God's law as a guide for daily decisions, many follow what they believe is the inward guidance of the Holy Spirit. One often hears phrases such as: "The Spirit led me to do this" or "I was led by God to do that." Such practices may help people think of themselves as more spiritual. But they are useless in seeking righteousness. They are totally subjective. Everything relating to righteousness must be derived from the Word of God attended by the power of the Holy Spirit.

By way of application, note that even in the way we approach God's Word there must be a focus on the seeking of righteousness. There are many who come to Scripture only to feed their interest in theological debate, exciting controversies or hard philosophical questions. They are not really interested in sanctification and drawing closer to God, but in winning arguments and showing off their intellects. Such men usually have active brains but rocky hearts. They may be skillful in chopping off heads in religious debates, but they ignore the weightier, more crucial

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas Watson as quoted in William S. Plumer, *The Law of God as Contained in the Ten Commandments, Explained and Enforced* (Harrisburg, VA: Sprinkle, [1864] 1996), 10.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

issues of biblical religion. If men really hungered and thirsted after righteousness would they not also be very interested in questions like: What can we do to mortify our sinful lusts? How can we make our calling and election more sure? How can we increase our love and devotion toward Jesus? There are many who play games with the Scriptures and twist it to their own destruction. Such people do not truly hunger and thirst after righteousness.

A strong hunger and thirst after righteousness involves attending to the other means of grace, especially the preached word. Such a man longs for public worship. His soul pants after the corporate worship of God. With David he will say, “I will declare Your name to my brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will praise You” (Ps. 22:22). “One thing I have desired of the LORD, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in His temple” (Ps. 27:4). A “heartly resolution to subject ourselves to follow the appointed means of communion-keeping with God, is a sound mark of solid faith.... In using of the means and ordinances of God’s house, the glory of the Lord may be seen, counsel and direction in all things may be had.”<sup>13</sup> This desire must hold a chief place in the heart and must be continued throughout life. David said, “My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and flesh cry out for the living God” (Ps. 84:2). “David complains of his being deprived of liberty of access to the Church of God, there to make a profession of his faith, to improve in godliness, and to engage in divine worship.”<sup>14</sup>

The preached Word is crucial for those who seek righteousness because it is the God ordained means whereby Christ applies His Word with power to hungry souls. The person who is serious about righteousness wants to be convicted by the preached Word. He wants to be wounded by the sword of the Spirit so that his infirmities and sins may be subdued. He pays close attention to the preached Word and prays for it to pierce through his soul, so that he would put off the old man and more and more be conformed into the likeness of His dear Savior.

Tragically, the de-emphasis of expository, applicatory preaching in our day reflects the fact that many professing Christians are not hungering after righteousness. They do not seek out preaching that cuts deep into the conscience, but rather crave preaching that tickles the ear. They “delight more in the garnishing of the dish than in food.”<sup>15</sup> “They are asleep in security and they hate a soul-awakening ministry...These prefer husks before manna. They live on airy notions, being fed by the ‘prince of the air.’”<sup>16</sup> Today, professing Christendom in our nation is at its weakest because there is no hunger for true spiritual meat. Good Reformed churches are generally quite small and ignored while the churches that skip the main course for an unhealthy sugary sweet concoction are bursting at the seams. Much of modern evangelicalism prefers child’s play and trifles to the nourishing food of Scripture. Men are very hungry; they are just not hungering for the right things. They want happiness, success, fulfillment and excitement. They want to be entertained and to drink in an exhilarating experience. But Jesus tells us that such thinking is gravely mistaken. He said, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Mt. 6:33). Beloved, let us not hunger after and seek vain things that are spiritually unprofitable; but, rather, spiritual things that exhort, convince and convict our souls; that cause us to turn from our sins toward godly behavior

Those who long for righteousness will also pray for it. As sinners saved by grace, we know that it is the Holy Spirit that gives us a desire for righteousness. Jeremiah prophesied that

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<sup>13</sup> David Dickson, *Commentary on the Psalms* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth [1653-55] 1959), 1:141-142.

<sup>14</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 1:455.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Watson, *The Beatitudes*, 125.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

God would work effectually upon our hearts. “I will put my fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me” (32:40). David assured us that, “He will not allow your foot to be moved... The LORD shall preserve you from all evil” (Ps. 121:3, 7). Paul wrote, “Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word” (Eph. 5:25). Peter taught that believers “are kept by the power of God through faith” (1 Pet. 1:5). It is obvious that prayer for personal righteousness is in accordance with God’s will. Jesus taught us to pray, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Mt. 6:13). “*In prayer*, how is the soul filled with passionate longings after Christ! Prayer is expressed by ‘groans unutterable’ (Romans 8:26). The heart sends up whole volleys of sighs to heaven; Lord, one beam of thy love! one drop of thy blood!”<sup>17</sup> “Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving” (Col. 4:2).

c) Hungering and thirsting after righteousness involves the daily practice of righteousness in our lives. The person who strongly desires to be righteous will “make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts” (Rom. 13:14). He will walk in the Spirit and will not fulfill the lust of the flesh (Gal. 5:17). He will crucify the flesh with its passions and desires (Gal. 5:24). He will not deliberately place himself in situations of temptation. He will not be unequally yoked with unbelievers (1 Cor. 6:14). He will seek out godly companions knowing that, “Evil company corrupts good habits” (1 Cor. 15:33). The person who seeks righteousness will put to death his “members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness which is idolatry” (Col. 3:5). “Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does” (Jas. 1:22-25).

The Jews were obsessed with external conformity to pharisaical rules and regulations. Jesus expects an inner righteousness that flows from a regenerated heart. He teaches that we ought to have righteousness in our thoughts, as well as our words and deeds. Our Lord will explain the radical nature of Christian righteousness as he contrasts the righteousness that He demands with the perverted righteousness of the Pharisees.

Third, the righteousness that the Savior’s disciples are to seek extends to social institutions and even nations. Believers are to seek justice in civil government, the law courts, in business dealings and family relationships. The great commission tells us explicitly that Christ has all authority in heaven and on earth; that the church has a responsibility to disciple the nations. This task involves teaching the nations “all things that Christ has commanded” (Mt. 28:20). Therefore, if the church is faithful and God brings reformation and revival, whole nations will abandon their idolatry and humanistic law for submission to Christ and his law. Believers should pray for and seek an end to the holocaust of abortion. They should strongly desire removal of euthanasia from our hospitals and assisted suicide from our states. They should hunger and thirst for the upholding of monogamous marriage between a man and a woman and diligently oppose the abomination of homosexual rights in all its forms. They should seek the overturning of laws that destroy covenant headship, weaken the family and contradict private property rights. We should be as Lot whose righteous soul was tormented day to day by seeing and hearing Sodom’s lawless deeds (2 Pet. 2:8). It was only the outcry of Christians in Nazi Germany that caused Hitler to stop his massive euthanasia plan in the 1930s. Believers will only be a salt and light to culture if they hunger and thirst after righteousness. Beloved, it is not

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 124.

enough merely to wish for righteousness; there must be strong hunger for it that affects our lives, that seeks to affect the lives of others. If the church is to have a real impact in our day, it must hunger less after the world and more after righteousness.

## They Shall be Filled

The great blessing for those believers who hunger and thirst for righteousness is that they will be filled. In other words, Christ will completely satisfy their strong spiritual desires. The verb that Jesus used, *chortasthesontai* (shall be filled), is a “very strong word, originally applied to the feeding and fattening of animals in a stall.”<sup>18</sup> The same word is used in Revelation 19:21 to describe the birds gorging themselves on the flesh of the wicked dead. It is also used to describe the multitudes that ate of the loaves and fishes that Jesus multiplied until they were so full they could eat no more (Mt. 14:20; Mk. 8:8; Lk. 9:17). This term expresses the truth that all those who have this Spirit-caused strong hunger and thirst for righteousness will be completely filled and satisfied in every possible way. Since the term righteousness applied to all aspects of biblical righteousness (legal, personal, social) the fulfilling of which our Lord speaks is comprehensive and applies to a number of areas.

First, there is the complete satisfaction of being justified through faith alone. Before Luther understood and rediscovered the true gospel of grace he was tormented by the fact that he knew he could never achieve a righteousness that would satisfy God’s demand for absolute moral perfection in thought, word and deed. He fasted, prayed, buffeted his body, went on pilgrimages and almost completely ruined his health attempting to meet God’s ethical requirements. It was only when he looked away from himself and his own feeble, sin-stained efforts toward Jesus and his perfect righteousness that his soul was satisfied.

The reason for this satisfaction is obvious—Christ removes all of our sins. “He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself...this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever sat down at the right hand of God...by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified...Their sins and lawless deeds I will remember no more” (Heb. 9:26; 10:10, 14, 17). He also imputes His perfect righteousness to us so that the gift of eternal life is ours. For those who desire and seek forgiveness; who want peace with God; who want reconciliation and fellowship with Him, Christ is the only one who can give satisfaction. Those who embrace the Savior by faith will be filled with “the peace of God which surpasses all understanding” (Phil. 4:7). Only Jesus can do this. Roman Catholics and all merit-mongers who look to their works or purgatory or jihad will never be satisfied, for they have not embraced our Lord’s perfect gift of righteousness. We must look to the Redeemer who promised, “Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life” (Jn. 4:14). “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never thirst” (Jn. 6:35).

People who look to the world will never be filled. “The world is fading, not filling. Cast three worlds into the heart, yet the heart is not full. But righteousness is a filling thing; nay it so fills that it satisfies. A man may be filled but not satisfied. A sinner may take his fill of sin, but that is a sad filling. It is far from satisfaction. ‘The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways’ (Proverbs 14:14). He shall have his belly full of sin; he shall have enough of it, but this is not a filling to satisfaction. This is such a filling that the damned in hell have. They shall be full

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<sup>18</sup> Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1887] 1946), 1:38.

of the fury of the Lord.”<sup>19</sup> But those who look to Jesus, who embrace Him, by faith, will never be disappointed. They will have satisfaction and rest for their souls.

Second, there is the great satisfaction of deliverance from the power of sin. The regenerate man longs for holiness. He knows, however, that he has been delivered from sin life by his union with Christ in His life, death and resurrection (cf. Rom. 6:3-13). He knows that, in Jesus, the old things have passed away and all things have become new (2 Col. 5:17). Yet because of the remaining imperfection of sin, his hunger in this life will never fully be satisfied. But, he knows that all those “who are displeased with their unbelief, who truly desire to be purged from distrust, who long and pray for increased faith and assurance—evidencing their sincerity by diligently using all proper means—are the subjects of God’s approbation.”<sup>20</sup> In sanctification their hunger will continue and they will continuously drink of the blessings of the Spirit. “Like all the qualities included in the beatitudes, hunger and thirst are perpetual characteristics of the disciples of Jesus, as perpetual as poverty of spirit, meekness and mourning. Not till we reach heaven will we ‘hunger no more, neither thirst any more,’ for only then will Christ our Shepherd lead us ‘to springs of living water.’”<sup>21</sup> Only then will the sin within us be a thing of the past. Oh, how we hunger and thirst to be completely free from the sin that remains with us in this life!

Third, there is the satisfaction of the perfect righteousness of the new heavens and the new earth. In it there will be perfect justice. There will no longer be “anything that defiles or causes an abomination or a lie” (Rev. 21:27). Wickedness, oppression and the curse will be no more. The ultimate fulfillment of this blessing is when the earth is completely renewed, the saints receive their spiritual, perfect and holy resurrected bodies which are incapable of sin and the wicked are cast into the lake of fire. Those who long for righteousness will behold the face of God. Yes, God takes care of the power of sin here with His blessed work of sanctification in us, but our desire for righteousness will yet be filled beyond measure in heaven.

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<sup>19</sup> Thomas Watson, *The Beatitudes*, 136.

<sup>20</sup> Arthur W. Pink, *An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount*, 27.

<sup>21</sup> John R. W. Stott, *Christian Counter Culture*, 46.