

JULY 25, 2021 | STUDY GUIDE |



CITIZENS OF THE KINGDOM

THE BEATITUDES

PART 5

"BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR
RIGHTEOUSNESS, FOR THEY WILL BE FILLED."

- MATTHEW 5:6



CITIZENS OF THE KINGDOM

I. Hunger and Thirst

The verbs used here for “hunger and thirst” speak of intense craving – a desperate sensation of longing.

II. Righteousness

The word “righteousness” is all over the Bible

“You lead me in the paths of *righteousness* for your name’s sake.”

– Psalm 23:3

“But let justice roll down like waters, and *righteousness* like an ever flowing stream.”

– Amos 5:24

“This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.”

– Romans 3:22

In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7)
“Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven...” (5:20)

“Beware of practicing your righteousness before others to be noticed by them...” (6:1).

“Seek first his [God’s] kingdom and his righteousness...” (6:33).

The “Big Picture”

“There is absolutely no concept in the Old Testament with so central a significance for all the relationships of human life as that of [righteousness]. It is the standard not only for humanity’s relationship to God, but also for his relationship to his fellows, reading right down to the most petty wrangling – indeed, it is even the standard for humanity’s relationship to the animals and to his natural environment.”

– Gerhard von Rad

Righteousness as Right-Relatedness

“Righteousness is not about living up to legal principles and standards. Rather, righteousness is about living in faithfulness to the terms of relationship.”

–Darrell Johnson

Three “Angles” on Righteousness

1. Legal righteousness speaks of a ‘right-standing’ with God that comes as a sheer gift (Rom 3:20ff). This is what “justification” is all about. Through trust in Jesus, God sees us as “just-as-if-I’d-never-sinned.”
2. Moral righteousness deals with the sort of character and conduct that we live with that would be pleasing to God.



3. Ethical or social righteousness. “Social righteousness is concerned with seeking humanity’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.” – John Stott. We should note, the Greek word here, *dikiosoune*, can be translated “righteousness” and “justice.”

For those transformed by God’s loving kindness – his gifted righteousness – there is a craving for God’s ways to permeate our everyday lives, and also that it would break into the world more broadly in terms of justice in the world.

III. The Promise

This beatitude – that promises blessing and “fullness”, “satisfaction” – it is in keeping with how Jesus describes his own approach to his Father in John 4:34: “My food is to do the will of the one who sent me.”

How could *my righteousness* surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees, for as Jesus says, it must. Unless it surpasses theirs, says Jesus, “you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt 5:20).

1. The Pharisees viewed their efforts, checking off the right ‘checklist’, as a means to attain a right-standing with God, as though what he were interested in were just ‘rule-following.’

“They [the scribes and Pharisees] thought of righteousness in terms of external conformity to the letter of the Law. But as Jesus shows us, one can obey the letter of the Law and not at all be faithful to the relationship being protected by the Law.”

– Darrell Johnson

2. Out of a transformed heart comes new ‘desires’ – new ‘hungers’.

Michael Wilkins says it well:
“The ultimate source of that kind of righteousness is God himself...This passionate pursuit of righteousness flows from a transformed heart.”

IV. Response and Implications

1. If you have a deep longing for the world to be put in right order, if you have a longing to live as God made you to, Jesus’ promise says: “don’t give up! You will be satisfied.”

2. Jesus not only promises ‘satisfaction’ and ‘fullness’ to those who hunger and thirst for ‘righteousness’ but says we are to actually *seek* – like, to be actively engaging in pursuing – life according to God’s righteousness (Mt 6:33).

Personal-Level: To pray for God’s “kingdom come and his will to be done” is to pray *against* our own little kingdom, our own will – to bring us in line with God’s will. This will require us to be confronted with, and honest about, how our own desires are often still bent and distorted.

We *do* have the choice to cultivate our longings, our appetites. “Taste and see that the Lord is good” – Psalm 34:8

One way to deepen our hungering and thirsting for righteousness is “tasting” – is growing our appetites in the right direction by letting his ways be where we feed, what we are paying attention to – God.

One reason I read the Bible is to be ‘fed’ on this vision of God’s Kingdom – to reorient my vision.

But more, too. That ‘tasting’ is very visceral. It’s stepping out, in faith, and beginning to live like it might actually be true.

“The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult; and left untried.”

– G.K. Chesterton

Corporate-Level: “Righteousness” does deals with the deeply personal – it starts there, but can’t stay there. Micah 6:8: “He has shown, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

To act “justly,” here means “to give advantage to the disadvantaged.” It means to address structures that burden and oppress.

In “tasting” – tasting the life that God calls us to – our hunger for the right things, for “right-relatedness” will grow; that we will be assured that our desire to the right to prevail will one day be realized.

Life Group Discussion and Reflection

Recall a time when you were really and truly hungry. What was it like? What was it like to finally sit down to a meal?

1. **Read Matthew 5:6:** “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.” What initial questions or thoughts does this text raise for you? Discuss how the Sunday sermon helped to clarify some of the questions you had about the meaning of righteousness.

2. In the message, Pastor Dave pointed out how righteousness is best understood as “right-relatedness” – as the four-fold relationships between us and God, others, our selves and the rest of creation. To ‘hunger and thirst for righteousness’, then, is to long for all our relationships to be what God intended them to be, to live according to his will, which is revealed most fully in the life and teaching of Jesus.





Life Group Discussion and Reflection

3. Wilkins says it well: “The ultimate source of that kind of righteousness is God himself...This passionate pursuit of righteousness flows from a transformed heart.” Why is this important? What does it guard against?
4. What appetites are distracting you from Jesus and his ways? What might you need to fast from in order to awaken a deeper longing for righteousness?
5. What “hunger-pangs” do you need to embrace in order to hunger and thirst for righteousness?
6. In what ways might you need to take steps to respond in order to pursue both personal and corporate forms of righteousness?

Prayer: Take some time to share prayer requests with your group. Pray for each other in response to your answers to questions 4, 5 and 6 above, that each person would take the steps they spoke of this upcoming week.