

Hungering & Thirsting After Righteousness

Let's turn in our Bibles, please, to the Gospel according to Matthew. The verse upon which I will be exhorting or preaching is Matthew chapter 5, verse 6, but we're going to begin reading at chapter 4, verse 23. This is from the passage known to all of us as the Sermon on the Mount, and I'll be reading the Beatitudes.

Matthew chapter 4, verse 23 through Matthew chapter 5, verse 13. Hear the word of God. And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people.

Then his fame went throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, paralytics, and he healed them. Great multitudes followed him from Galilee and from Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan. And seeing the multitudes, he went up on a mountain.

And when he was seated, his disciples came to him. Then he opened his mouth and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for this word this morning. And we ask that as I exegete it and proclaim it, Father, that I would speak truthfully and accurately. And your Holy Spirit would take to each of us that which we need to get from your message this morning.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

Okay, so this is the Sermon on the Mount. Now, to understand what's happening in the Sermon on the Mount, we need to look at the context. And for those of you that have known me all the years I've been here, my first rule of interpretation is always context.

And my second rule of interpretation is context. And my third rule of interpretation is, wait, you got it, context. So in Matthew chapter four, Matthew's recording the beginning of Jesus' ministry.

And Matthew chapter four divides into some sections. First, from verses one to 11 is the temptation of Jesus by Satan. Then verses 12 to 17, Jesus begins preaching in the North by the Sea of Galilee.

Verses 18 to 22, Jesus calls his first disciples. Verses 23 to 25, where we began reading, Jesus expands his ministry to all of Galilee. Galilee was a province in that day.

The whole, what we consider the Holy Land and the lands around us were divided into providence with various rulers. Galilee is one. Below that, as we understand, is Samaria.

And then below that is Judea. So Judea is down by the Dead Sea. At the very top of the Holy Land is Galilee, the Sea of Galilee.

Now, we need to understand, as Jesus is beginning his ministry, what the content of his preaching is, what the focus of his ministry is. So in verse 17 of chapter four, we read, repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. In verse 19, as he's calling disciples, Jesus says, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.

And then in the passage we read, Jesus is teaching and preaching of the gospel of the kingdom and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the peoples. And that included diseases, pains, demon oppression, epileptics, paralytics. Everyone that was brought to Jesus, we read, he healed.

So Jesus' fame spread. So in chapter four, he starts calling disciples. He's working in Upper Galilee as he, in the passage where we began reading at verse 23 of chapter four, he's going about all of Galilee now, and he's teaching in the synagogues, he's preaching.

And we read in verse 24 that his fame went throughout Syria. And then we read that in verse 25, the great multitudes followed him from Galilee, where he was, the province in the north, where he was, from the Decapolis, which is the east side of the Jordan. By the way, I'm going to do this, but as my wife knows, and many of you have known through the years, I am geographically challenged.

So I think I'm going to get this right. Yes, the east side of the Jordan is the Decapolis. Jerusalem is south in Judea.

Judea is the province in which Jerusalem finds itself and goes all the way, goes much further down. And from beyond the Jordan, we're talking about the east side of the Jordan. Multitudes are coming to Jesus basically from all over.

Now, as Pastor Mathis has been emphasizing through his Sunday school class on church history occasionally, and in his sermons, it was not a day like ours. They didn't hop in a car, hop on a motorcycle, and drive 30 or 60 miles. A good day's journey was about 17 miles, maybe 20 miles.

So you're coming from 100 miles away, you're spending days, which would be the south of Judea, you're spending days to get there because of Jesus' fame and how far it's reached. So when we come to the Beatitudes, as we enter chapter five, Jesus, we read, sees the crowds.

Well, if I'm talking to you in a Sunday school class, we'll all put some chairs in a circle, we're on the same level, we can see each other just fine.

When we're preaching, I'm up on a stage so that it's easier for me to see you, it's easier for you to see me. And so you're going to see me Jesus does what a rabbi, somebody who is known as a teacher, a formal teacher does. He sits down.

Okay, you're used to school, which you've gone through, where the teacher's always walking around in the Jewish context and culture of the time. If you're the teacher, you sit down, then everybody else sits down. And then if you have a question to ask, you don't raise your hand, you stand up, which by the way, is much easier to see than somebody raising a hand.

So Jesus now, because of the multitudes, seeks a position where he can be seen and see. So he goes in an elevated position here. And so imagine in your minds, if I'm sort of where Jesus is, the first group around me are going to be disciples, but he's no longer speaking to the disciples primarily.

He now has multitudes to whom he's speaking. And they're going to pay attention. That's why they'd come, they'd come days, they'd come hours, you know, they'd spent time and money, they're away from their work, their family, because of the fame of Jesus and also because he's been healing everybody.

So they want to listen to what Jesus has to say. And Jesus is speaking to them as a rabbi, somebody that they, and they understood that from the context when he sat down. And then Matthew characterizes what Jesus does in verse two.

He opened his mouth and taught them saying. So what Jesus is going to do in the Sermon on the Mount is teaching.

Blessed Are – A Call to Repentance

Now, the first point of the sermon, blessed are called a repentance or blessed are, you'll notice I said, when I was reading it, I said blessed for a while, then I switched to blessed.

We have two different ways of pronouncing the word in English. So Jesus begins this sermon to the multitude with a series of pithy sayings. They could be classed as Proverbs and we call them the Beatitudes because that comes from the word in Latin blessed or blessed.

But what does it mean? Now, some of you, as I look around, are old enough to remember when good news for modern man came out in the New Testament or the today's English version as its formal title and the Beatitudes in good news for modern man. And the TV were translated as happy are. So not blessed are the poor in spirit, happy are the poor in spirit.

And many of us felt that that was just an inappropriate translation. I mean, blessed is sort of a stained glass word. I call it a stained glass word.

It's we associate it with our faith, like great hymns of the faith. It evokes a feeling in us. And so to be suddenly confronted with the happy hours was almost offensive.

In fact, I became a Christian the year after I graduated college, and I was still in my town working with college folk. And they used to make jokes about the, and this is when good news for modern man came out. And so the college Christians would make fun about the happy hours.

Surely it was a weak translation, but was it? OK, there are two words in Greek that are translated into English as blessed. One is eulogeto and the other is Markarius. Now, eulogeto means it's of man's duty to speak well of God in the form of praise or thanksgiving.

We want to bless God. That would be eulogeto. Or calling down God's gracious power on people to invoke a blessing, to ask God to bless you.

That'd be eulogeto. God's action in bestowing a blessing. That would be the word eulogeto.

So that's one concept of blessed. And some examples, Luke 6, 28, bless those who curse you and pray for those who spitefully use you. That is, that's the first word, eulogeto.

Acts 3, 26. To you first, God, having raised up his servant, Jesus, sent him to bless you in turning away every one of you from your iniquities. That's this eulogeto word.

Hebrews 6, 14. Surely blessing I will bless you and multiplying I will multiply you. That's eulogeto for blessed.

And 1 Peter 3, 9. Not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. That's eulogeto. The concept of the duty to speak well, to proclaim a blessing.

Okay. Eulogeto is not used in the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes, where we read blessed is the other word, which is marcarious.

And marcarious is an interesting word because it doesn't have a good translation in English. One of the problems when you're dealing with languages is there are words that may have a concept. You can't do a simple word for word translation.

You have to use several words. And one of the reasons why you'll see in your translation, if you look up a Greek or a Hebrew word, it's translated so many different ways. It's because we don't have a English word that encompasses the concept of what's involved.

And that's partially the case here with marcarious. So marcarious doesn't mean your duty to speak or God giving you a blessing. It recognizes an existing state of happiness or good fortune, a quality of spirituality that is already present.

And in Greek, it means fortunate or happy, usually in the sense of a privileged recipient of divine favor. In Hebrew thought, it denotes a state of true well-being. Now I'm reading a

book, misreading scripture with Western eyes, which I may turn eventually into a Sunday school class.

And the authors there deal a little bit with *marcarious*. The Greek have a word for the feeling one has when one's happy, and it's *marcarious*. It's a feeling of contentment when one knows one's place in the world and is satisfied with that place.

English doesn't have a word for this feeling. And so translators struggle to translate *marcarious*, and in the Beatitudes, they came up with *blessed*. Now, the issue becomes that when we're reading the Beatitudes, we can easily misread them.

If *marcarious* is a state of happiness or contentment that you are in now, then actually the translation *happy* is a decent translation of the Greek, and *blessed* may be a little more questionable, if you will. So when what Jesus is proclaiming in the Beatitudes, and the way we often misread them, is not that *blessed* are the people that do X because they will receive Y. So *blessed* are the merciful because they shall obtain mercy. It's not *blessed* are those who mourn because they're going to be *blessed* because they will inherit the earth.

It's not an ethical exhortation. Okay, the biggest point here in the my first point of the sermon is to have you understand that the Beatitudes are not calling us to a behavior. So we're not to be poor.

We're not to figure out how do I get to be poor in spirit? How do I mourn? How do I be? How am I meek, hunger and thirst for righteousness, merciful? That's not what the Beatitudes are saying. It's not saying that in the future tense, we will receive, we will be, if we work on it, we'll be meek or hunger and thirst for righteousness. And that's something that we want to work toward.

What Jesus is saying with the use of the word *marcarious*, is that the citizen of the kingdom of heaven is happy now, present tense. He has a distinctive joy now, present tense. And that yes, in X, they will receive Y. So their teachings of good news about the kingdom.

Now let's go back to whom Jesus is speaking. Jesus is speaking to these multitudes who have come from all over. Jesus is not telling them, you need to change your life.

You need to do these ethical steps. What Jesus is telling them is he's explaining to them what a citizen of the kingdom is. Is.

He's calling them to compare how they are now with how he presents the characteristics of a citizen of the kingdom now. He's calling them, remember he's, Matthew said he's teaching, he's preaching the gospel. He's calling them to repentance.

He's not calling them to hear, you know, I said this last week in the evening, you know, how, how would the Equal Report, for example, our most, our favorite articles are always those that give a list of steps because boy, we in the West love to know that that's not what Jesus is saying here. He's calling them to compare themselves with that which they ought to be if they want to be in the kingdom of heaven. And they are calls for radical kingdom life.

There's a radical nature in this because Jesus is saying to them, you need to understand if this is what the citizen of the kingdom is like, where are you now? So the first point of the sermon deals with the fact that the Beatitudes are not an ethical call, a series of things that we need to do ethically. They are, this is, they are the picture portrait, if you will, of characteristics of the citizen of the kingdom to which we can compare ourselves.

Hungering and Thirsting for Righteousness

And we're going to look in the second point, if blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

So Jesus is saying, this is what, as we understand, as we exegese what this means, hunger and thirst after righteousness, Jesus is asking them to compare themselves. Do you do that? Not, I've got to go figure out how do I hunger and thirst after righteousness? Is this who you are? So let's take a look at verse six. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.

Now, the first thing you've got to understand is you do not hear that the way the multitudes that were in front of Jesus heard it. I mean, hunger and thirst, we all understand hunger and thirst, don't we? I mean, really? Do we? In our Western world, you may feel hunger pangs. Your stomachs may gurgle and rumble.

You may get dry. That's why everybody that preaches up here has water. Very dry job standing up here.

But look around. You go out on Yale, you go out on Downing, you go north or south, you're going to find a fast food restaurant within a few miles. You turn on Evans, you got nothing but fast food restaurants.

How many of you carry a water bottle with you everywhere? Just because this is Colorado, we're elevated, we know we need to keep water in our system. In the Middle East, the people to whom Jesus was teaching, there was a desert. People died of hunger.

They died from lack of water. When famine struck in the Middle East in biblical times, the local king's suppliers didn't just call somebody and some trucks came from somewhere else with food. There was no food, period.

If the well ran dry in a time of drought, we're in a time of drought now. What are we used to? Well, they raise our water rates and they ask us to please restrict our water use, but we still have water. If the well ran dry in the biblical times, there was no water.

These were realities that the crowd in front of Jesus, they understood. You heard, you know, occasionally you'll hear the actress say, well, I've been starving myself for so many years so I can keep my figure in and my, you know, and look good for the camera and all that good stuff. Well, Jesus here would have known what real starvation was.

Hunger that never went away. And if they were poor, it lasted days, weeks. For the crowd, hunger and thirst were matters of life and death.

Water in the Middle East in the desert is called the wine of God. So Jesus is calling the crowd to compare themselves against the kingdom citizen who hungers and thirsts after righteousness, who has an unrelenting passion for righteousness. Now, we look at a righteousness several different ways.

For justice, this word can be translated innocence. We talk about it as our relationship to God and how do we have the proper relationship with God. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst because they care about, it's a passion for them, as the crowd in front of Jesus would have understood, hunger and thirst, that they care that much.

It is a priority to think about God and how we are, we ought to be behaving and acting for him. Notice what Jesus does not say in this beatitude. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled.

He doesn't say the kingdom is going to be filled with people who live righteously and maintain a righteous lifestyle. That's a call to ethics. And that's how this beatitude is often misunderstood.

Rather, Jesus is saying, just as you understand hunger, just as you understand thirst, it's something that's with you all the time. That's what righteousness should be like. You should hunger and thirst for righteousness.

It should be with you all the time. It's something it's part of your life. It's who you are now.

The joy that comes from being blessed, *marcaris*, belongs to those who continue day in day out toward righteousness. They seek after righteousness the way a starving man seeks after food. They seek after righteousness, he says, the way a man dying of thirst seeks for water.

It's their most important priority. Jesus is saying, this is what the citizen of the kingdom is like. As you think about God and your relationship to God, as you stand before God, and the unwritten, unspoken question then to the crowds is, where are you? Jesus says, they have that joy and happiness now, and they'll be filled.

Okay. Quick word on filled. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

The word filled in the Greek deals with having enough food to eat. A lot of translations, it'll be satisfied. But the concept is, you're going, you know, if you're hungry because you don't have enough food, you will have.

So you're going to, that righteousness for which you hunger and thirst, you will have. You're happy now as you search, as you seek for it, search for it, strive for it, maybe. But it's who you are.

You can no longer, you're going to hunger and thirst after righteousness because that's what it means to be a citizen of the kingdom. And Jesus says, you will be filled. So what about us? Because we're in the crowd to whom Jesus speaks.

Jesus calls us in the beatitudes, in each beatitude to measure ourselves against the kingdom citizen that he portrays. How much do I strive after righteousness? How much of it is, how much is it a passion of mine? How much does it characterize my life? Or am I, what about you? Or are we undisciplined? Are we lukewarm? Does sanctification have little meaning for us? Jesus is calling his crowd to repentance of the lives they live with each beatitude including this one. And he sets before them the characteristic of a kingdom citizen.

He calls the crowds to turn 180 degrees. Remember these are people from, these are Jews and Gentiles. They are in the covenant people of God, but they don't mostly understand what it means to be in the covenant of God.

And so Jesus is calling them to turn their lives from a sort of vague commitment to being a Jew, to understand the covenant God and live as a kingdom citizen. And he himself provides an example of such a life. First Peter 3.18 we read for Christ also suffered once for sins the just for the unjust that he might bring us to God being put to death in the flesh, but made alive by the spirit.

And Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5.21 for he made him who knew no sin to be sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in him. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. That's your existing state.

You're blessed. If you've never trusted in Jesus then repent of that sin and follow him. If you trusted in Jesus, but your life is not characterized, who you are is not characterized by a concern for righteousness, then repent of that sin, turn and follow him.

Jesus promises the same for both. You will have joy now as you seek righteousness and then you will be filled, you will be satisfied when he comes again. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for these words from Jesus. We thank you and ask that you would help us to be merciful, to be blessed, fortunate in that state of joy because we live to you. Help us to grow in that and help us to continue to proclaim the grace which is found only in Christ Jesus.

In his name we ask it. Amen.