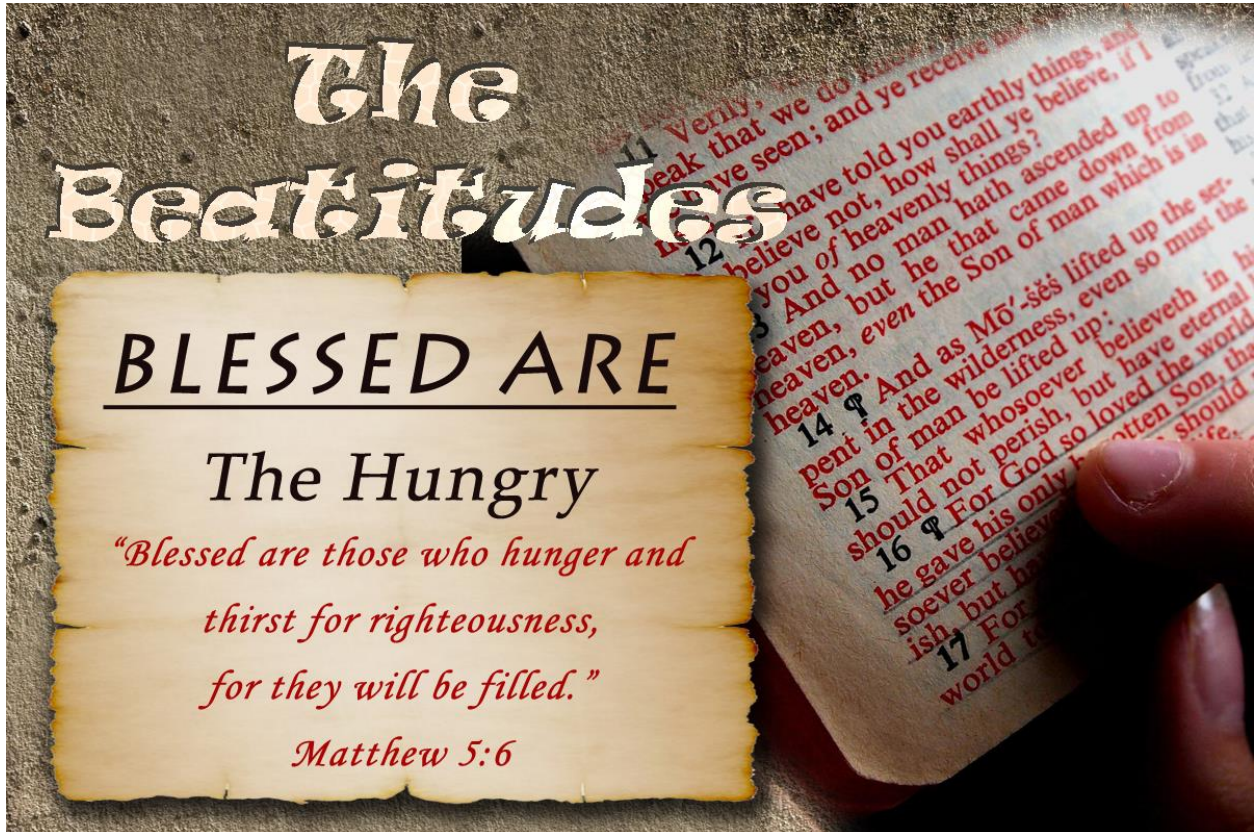


July 24 "Blessed are the Hungry"

Matthew 5:6

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



Special Music: "Hungry" Kathryn Scott

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iPZMEfkb0VQ>

HUNGER AND THIRST

Having tasted your bread of life
I hunger for your word.
Let my soul feast
Like a ravenous beast
Focused and undeterred.

Having drunk the Living Water,
I thirst for your presence.
I fall to my knees
My desire to please
In sweet acquiescence

Having tasted your blessed bread
At your table of welcome,
Your body so broken
And words left unspoken
I will feast 'til the very last crumb.

Having drunk from your cup
At your table of grace,
The wine of your blood
Overflowing with love
Removing my sin and disgrace.

Having breathed in your breath
From the dawn of creation
I seek out your spirit
And find when I'm near it
A state of joy and elation.

I shall feast at your table
And humbly attend
Eating bread so divine
Drinking your wine
May my hunger and thirst never end.

The story is told of an elderly priest and a young priest walking a path along a river. The young priest turns to his elder and asks, "What is it like to hunger for God?" The elderly priest responds by saying, "The lesson is greater if I show you rather than to tell you. Come with me." The elderly priest led the young priest into the river water until it reached their chests. He then turned to his protégé and asked, "Do you trust me?" The young priest replied, "With my life." The old priest then put his hand on top of the young priest's head, pushed him under the water, and held him there. The young priest struggled vainly against the old priest's strong arms. Just when he believed he would drown, the old priest lifted his hands and let him rise up straight. The young man was coughing violently, and he gasped for air. The elderly priest helped the young priest to the shore and let him rest. After he had regained his breath and could once again speak, the young priest yells, "What did you do that for? I could have died." The older priest takes a stick and draws circles in the mud and then speaks without looking at the young man. "Do you remember that moment when all of your other problems ceased to be, and your only thought was for your next breath of air?" The young priest thought about it and finally nodded. "That is what it is like to hunger for God. The moment you realize that your relationship with God is the only thing that really matters, that is the moment you understand your hunger for God. While you may eat until you are filled, you will always want more because that is the nature of your relationship with your Creator. If you want to draw close to the master of Creation, you must be willing to gasp for the breath that only God can provide."

- 1 You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water.***
- 2 I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory.***
- 3 Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you.***
- 4 I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands.***
- 5 I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you.***

Psalm 63:1-5

Do we hunger and thirst for God? Do we want his constant presence in our lives, no matter the circumstances? When we find ourselves in a place that we know we shouldn't be, do we put God away in a cabinet until we finish what we are doing? How hungry are we? How thirsty are we? Have we allowed the hunger and thirst to wane in the throws of life? Do we want God more than we want the world? Do we understand that to know God is to want to spend every moment of every day in his presence? Is there anything in our lives more important than our relationship with God?

I know that in many ways those questions may sound somewhat redundant, but they really aren't. Our relationship with our Creator is a lot like the way that gravity works in space. As objects in the universe get nearer to each

other the greater the pull of gravity between them. This is even true at the subatomic level as electrons spin around the nucleus of an atom. Isn't it amazing that God built the core attributes of His relationship with us in the same way? The closer we come to God in our relationship to Him, the closer we want to be. God will allow us to get as close as we want. Just like planets, moons, comets, and meteors, we can have either a very close orbit or a long orbit. The closer orbits are faster in an attempt to maintain the orbit, while those far away are very slow. If we choose to be far away from God, our orbit will be very slow and our benefits will be negligible. But, if we choose to have a closer orbit to God, the benefits are greatly increased. The question becomes, do we want to have an exciting orbit like the one Mercury has with the sun, constantly moving and changing with the sun's energy? Or do we want to have an orbit like Pluto, where the sun has a hard time providing any benefit as the planetoid keeps its distance in the freezing expanse of space?

Most of us want enough distance between us and God, that we can put Him aside and out of the way when we don't want Him around. The gravity is weak enough that we can push Him back when His presence is inconvenient or embarrassing. But being able to do that also means that we can't receive the full range of benefits He has to offer. When we are in a close orbit, the presence of God is impossible to ignore and His warmth is undeniable. It is much more difficult and even undesired to push him out of the way and lock Him in a cabinet. Not only that, the closer we are, the closer we want to be. But being far away can be extremely lonely and cold.

Sometimes, we fumble around thinking we want to improve our relationship with our Creator and pray for things like patience, dependence, mercy, and grace without realizing that these are learned attitudes and require lessons to fully appreciate them. Those lessons are hard. Just ask anyone who has ever prayed for patience. We can get into the middle of those lessons and quickly give up, finding them much too difficult for our mortal minds and spirits. They can seem spiritually unattainable. “I can’t do this! No one could do this! I can’t wait any longer! I can’t forgive people the way that Jesus did! I can’t get any closer to God because I will be burned up by His presence or I just don’t want to have my life exposed to that kind of energy.”

But we aren’t the template for righteousness. People should not be led to believe that they should live up to our standards. And while we may foolishly believe that our standards are too high for most people to live up to, in reality, they are way too low. We are not the example that is needed, but we should reflect the example that is needed. Jesus set the standard and the bar is high; higher than any of us could attain. When people are looking at us, we should be pointing to Jesus, not ourselves.

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

If we become complacent with our Pluto experience, wandering the cold vastness of space, it is usually because we are satisfied with the way we are

controlling our own lives. But when trouble comes at us, we think it might have been a bit foolish and we suddenly want to adjust our orbit to be closer to the safety of God's hands. But that takes energy and commitment. If we choose to expend that energy, what can we expect in return?

To answer that question, we need to talk about the process of drawing closer to God. It isn't a matter of just being envious of the relationship that others have with Christ. There's a price involved. Last week we talked a little about Matthew 11:29:

“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

We can sit around all day and say, “I wish I knew as much about the Bible as Joyce. I wish I had the forgiving nature of Bruce. I wish that I could pray like Samantha. I wish I had a heart for the needy like Dave.” An old Scottish nursery rhyme says, “If wishes were fishes, we'd all swim in riches.”

If we value the heart of Jesus and want to bring ourselves in line with it, then we will have to work for it. If we want to have a greater understanding of the Bible, we need to dust off our Bibles and start reading the scriptures again daily. I find it truly amazing the number of Christians, even those who have been Christians for many years, that have never read the Bible cover to cover. Why is that such a struggle if we truly want to understand the scripture? If you are

interested in pursuing that, I can point you to many studies that will take you through the Bible in a year.

If we want to have a more forgiving nature, then let us start by forgiving someone that has done us harm that we have never forgiven. Let's meet them for lunch, call them on the phone, write them a letter. We don't even have to mention the issue that created the problem. We should forgive them and then treat them like that are forgiven. We should wash the incident down the drain and don't let it continue to stain and fog our perception and relationship. We should cease to allow the incident to remain a barrier between us.

If we want to learn to pray, then we should start setting aside time every day to pray. We can start with something simple, like thanking God for the beautiful day that He has provided. We can thank Him for our loved ones and His daily provision. We can read and study "The Lord's Prayer." We can remind ourselves that every waking moment is an opportunity to engage in conversation with our Creator. Soon, we will start having a regular dialogue with God throughout the day.

If we want to have an improved heart for the needy, then we can get more involved with local volunteer work. We can help at the area food banks, even if it is at another church. We can work a few hours at the local thrift store. We can buy someone a meal. We can step into that space where they are and help meet their needs. That is the way that we improve our heart for the needy.

By doing these things, we are drawn closer and closer to God, reducing the size of our orbit, allowing us even greater access to His love and grace. But even more importantly, the greater our hunger to serve our Creator, the greater the provisions for ourselves. As our hunger for Him increases, so does His provisions to meet that hunger. As we pant for His water, the more water He provides. Our hunger and thirst will never outgrow His ability or desire to fill us. How beautiful and amazing is that?

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for they will be filled.**

So, why does Jesus specifically mention those who hunger and thirst for righteousness? This all sounds like common sense, doesn't it? Jesus brings this up because most Christians are simply unwilling to invest in growth. They treat the beatitudes like a menu at a restaurant. "Hmmm, that sounds good," "yes, I can do that one," "that one, well, it may be just a little too difficult. I'm not going to even try it." But it isn't a menu. This isn't a smorgasbord. Yes, there are certain things that we are better at than others, but we should strive for all that Christ is talking about. We have a tendency to treat the list of beatitudes like a "Pick your blessing" and thinking that it will cost us this much effort.

I will admit that most Christians probably struggle with "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." It takes a lot of energy to gain this blessing. It requires intent and action. Let's face it, all of us are going to mourn, we are all going to have times when we are poor in spirit, we are all going to have

times when we are afraid. And while some of the other beatitudes that we are talking about require action, it is generally for the benefit of others and given to selfless acts. “Bless are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness” is directly apportioned to self-growth. It requires us to better ourselves and become more like Jesus. It requires us to look in the mirror and discern where we are growing and where we are falling short. That is so very hard to do because it points out both our flaws and our lack of desire to draw closer to God. It reflects our attention span, our indifference, and our disengagement.

We can all do better. We can all commit to growth and improvement. We can all take our Christian walk more seriously. And Christ tells us that there are blessings in that. If we choose to grow, we will be filled. If we choose to “hunger and thirst after righteousness,” we will not come up empty. Everything that we attempt in the growth process will bring us into a closer relationship with our Creator. The closer we get the more prominent His presence in our lives.

This week, I want us all to stand before our mirrors and look at ourselves. Really look at ourselves. Don’t just look at the reflection but look into your own eyes and see if you can discern where you stand in this process of seeking righteousness, hungering and thirsting to grow closer to God. Are we just dipping our toes in the water occasionally to test it, or are we jumping right in and embracing the life that God has to offer? Opportunities abound for growth. They are all around us. Let us avail ourselves of those opportunities.

God bless you all! **AMEN**

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