

“Those Who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness”

The fourth blessed attitude is: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled.” (Matthew 5:6) When we are meek, or we can say that Jesus is our Lord and we are submitting our life to His control, Jesus teaches that we should now hunger and thirst after righteousness.

We now see a pattern emerging that the beatitudes come in pairs, or couplets. We mourn while we are learning to be poor in spirit and when we become meek we will hunger and thirst for righteousness. Righteousness is simply rightness or doing what is right. To hunger and thirst after righteousness is to hunger and thirst to know what is right - especially to know what is right for you.

As soon as Paul became meek on the Road to Damascus, he wanted to know what was right for him. When he called Jesus “Lord” and asked what his Lord wanted him to do, he was not only illustrating meekness. He was also illustrating what it means to have a hunger and a thirst for righteousness.

The explanation of the righteous indignation or anger of Jesus we read about in the Gospels is that what the religious leaders were doing to the Temple of God was contrary to what was right. Observe the passion of Jesus to do the will of His Father. Then realize that a passion for doing what is right includes a passion for confronting and putting right what is clearly wrong.

In this Sermon on the Mount, observe the emphasis of Jesus on the vital importance of righteousness: The last Beatitude is, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:10). Two of the eight Beatitudes are about rightness. Later in this chapter He teaches: “For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” (5:20) Also at the beginning of the sixth chapter He teaches: “Be careful not to do your acts of righteousness before men, to be seen of men.” In the second half of the sixth chapter He teaches values. He reaches the conclusion of His teaching about values when He prescribes the number-one priority value: “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness ...” (6:33)

The promise that accompanies this Beatitude is that the disciple will be filled full of the righteousness for which they hunger and thirst. The original Greek language suggests the idea that they will be so filled with righteousness they will choke. This also means they will be filled completely with the Holy Spirit of God, Who is Righteousness and they will be filled with a hunger and thirst to know what He wants them to do.

Make the observation that the Beatitude here is not “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after happiness for they shall be made very happy.” It is not, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for fulfillment.” It is not, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after prosperity, for they shall be very prosperous.” That is not what is promised here. The beatitude is, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.” And the promise is that they shall be filled full of rightness and a passion to do what is right.

Great champions who have addressed injustice - like those who accomplished the abolition of slavery – were devout disciples of Jesus Christ. With a hunger and thirst for that which was right they also had a passion for attacking what was not right. Nobel Peace Prize winners, like Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela demonstrated their hunger and thirst for righteousness by peacefully crying out against the injustice of racism. If you trace the word “righteousness” through the Bible, you will see that Jesus was being consistent with Scripture when He emphasized the concept that the disciple who is filled with righteousness confronts unrighteousness.

One of my favorite righteousness verses is: “Offer the sacrifices of righteousness and put your trust in the Lord.” (Psalm 4:5) The Psalmist is not able to sleep because he is a spiritual man who is doing what is

expedient rather than what is right. He resolves that he is going to make whatever sacrifices he must to do what is right. Only then he experiences peace and restfully sleeps. His motivation for this decision is that he knows he is surrounded by people who are looking for something good. They are looking for someone who will do what is right rather than what is expedient.

As Jesus emphasizes the personal integrity and righteousness of His disciples, He is making the statement that one reason why those people at the bottom of the mountain are miserable and unhappy is because they are doing what nearly everybody else does. They are doing that which is expedient rather than that which is right.

Another verse I must reference from dozens of verses about righteousness declares that the people of God are to be called "Trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified". (Isaiah 61:3)

It is the plan of God - and therefore the strategy of Jesus at this retreat - to recruit disciples who will be conduits of rightness as they return to that multitude of people at the foot of the mountain who represent the lost people of this world. His design is that His disciples should be planted in this world like trees of righteousness to the glory of God.