

## **Blessed Are Those Who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness**

Matthew 5:6

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What motivates you when you get up in the morning?

Without a cup of coffee or two, some of you poor addicted souls aren't motivated to do anything.

Thankfully, with today's technology you can prepare your coffee the night before so the smell can pull you right up off your pillow and help jumpstart your day.

Whether we are first motivated by caffeine flowing through our veins or not, we all find energy and motivation from somewhere.

When motivation is mostly biological, psychologists refer to these as primary drives. These include things like thirst, sleep, hunger, and sex.

One of the reasons Satan tempted Jesus in the desert with turning stones into bread is that he knew Jesus was famished. He thought that after Jesus had fasted for weeks he would turn the stones into bread to prove that he was the Son of God.

Why go hungry if you had the power to make a meal out of stones?

However, Jesus didn't have anything to prove to Satan. He wasn't motivated by showmanship nor any desire to prove his divinity.

While he did have biological drives like the rest of us, he didn't allow them to lead him into sin.

As those who are created just a little lower than the angels, thankfully we are motivated by many things other than our primary drives. Unfortunately, because of our fallen nature, not all of them are good. We are motivated by a mixed bag of things like money, material possessions, love, social status, achievement, praise, revenge, justice, and success to name a few.

These are called secondary drives. These are not biological. For these to become solidified in our lives, there must be some reinforcement taking place.

With a primary drive like hunger, all we have to do is be born and our body starts craving food and we cry out for someone to satisfy our appetite. Our crying says, "Give me something to stop this empty feeling in my stomach."

As a baby, we are put to the breast of a mother and we find the warm milk that fills our bellies or we are given a bottle and all is well with the world.

For the rest of our lives we live in search for food, appeasing our appetite multiple times a day. The subsiding of our hunger is the reinforcement that we need to do this over and over again.

Secondary drives are different. At very young ages we don't know anything about how important it is to have a good education, but we do respond to praise.

Praise becomes the secondary drive that helps us learn our colors, numbers, and letters. Praise may not be biologically necessary for survival, but to be healthy emotionally, it is very important.

Since we have a hunger and thirst for praise, we will learn our colors and numbers just to hear an adult say, "Good job!" and give us a big smile. Those children who never receive praise for doing good things end up with a poor self-esteem and can easily gravitate toward the wrong life if they are praised for doing the wrong things.

Finding purpose and happiness in our lives is at the root of how much power and emphasis we give many of these primary or secondary drives in our lives.

Animals are just following their biological drives to survive and pass their genes onto the next generation, but we are trying to attach some meaning to our existence.

We know that life is more than just eating, sleeping, and having babies.

Here in the fourth beatitude, Jesus helps us understand where happiness, blessedness, and meaning are found.

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

"Righteousness" is the key to living a life that is filled with assurance and blessing from God. If we hungered and thirsted for righteousness as we do for the primary and secondary drives of life, Jesus said we will be filled — we will find meaning and purpose in life.

Our lives would be blessed. This doesn't mean we would be free of all problems. It does mean that in the midst of our problems we would not lose purpose.

So, what is righteousness?

Righteousness is being acceptable in the eyes of God. How does that happen?

The Pharisees believed righteousness was all about doing the right religious things, keeping all the laws of Moses and the prophets. That sounds noble. The problem is that we can't keep all of the laws. There are too many. We are too imperfect.

Jesus taught that righteousness had more to do with an attitude of the heart than a total of our actions.

Let me explain it like this:

The astronauts of Apollo 13 were supposed to land on the moon, but something in their ship went terribly wrong. In the blink of an eye their dream of a lunar landing was gone and hope shifted to making it home to earth safely. Their fuel supply was low and their oxygen supply was even lower. Success was dependent upon a small team of people on earth who had to come up with a plan to use the small amount of fuel to propel them to earth. They had to enter the atmosphere at just the right angle so they would not burn up and do it before their oxygen ran out. The team had to be right. It was a matter of life and death. The astronauts had to trust the team to live. (<http://dg4kids.com/bible-time/day-one-god-is-always-right>)

The astronauts of Apollo 13 could have been arrogant and told Mission Control that they would determine their own destiny. They would make their own decisions and would not trust their lives to anyone else. That decision would likely have been fatal. That is what happens when we become self-righteous, like the Pharisees.

You and I have already missed our mark and we continue to do when we depend on ourselves to find our way back to God. The question is, “Are we going to rely on our own judgment about what is right or wrong or will we trust in the Lord to guide us back to where we should be?”

As hard as we might try, we cannot do enough good things to be acceptable in God’s eyes. However, Jesus did say, “if we have a hunger and a thirst for doing what is right in God’s eyes, we will be filled.” God will fill us. God will bless us.

Do you see the difference? There is some humility in play here.

Romans 4:7-8 gets to the heart of it:

“Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the one against whom the Lord will not reckon sin.’ Even though we are flawed with sin and even if we have a hunger and a thirst to do the right thing, we must be declared right in God’s sight.”

Do you see the difference? It is not by our works that righteousness comes. God declares us righteous. That righteousness comes as a result of our desire, of our hunger for it, but not as a result of our goodness.

Even when we miss the mark, grace is offered when we come to God with a contrite heart. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall see God.”

To live an abundant life and to live a life of eternal significance, we must trust in the Lord who specializes in being right—all the time. God is the one who is righteous, not us.

Our problem is like the one Adam and Eve had. We think our way is right. We see something that looks appetizing and we take it. We see things that look filling in all kinds of ways, physically, emotionally, financially, socially, and they are not right, but we think they are.

“Sometimes there is a way that seems to be right, but in the end, it is the way to death” (Proverbs 16:25)

The Psalmist wrote, “You are righteous, O Lord, and your judgments are right. You have appointed your decrees in righteousness and in all faithfulness” (Psalm 119:137-138).

To be blessed, we need to affirm the words of the Psalmist and take an inventory of our diet to determine what we are thirsting for and what we are hungry for.

What activities have been most important to us? What thoughts have claimed the driver’s seat of our minds? What have we been most excited about spending our time doing? What is it that is most important to us?

See what you are feasting on and determine if you can say that in everything you have a hunger to live in a way that is acceptable to God.

We can wear religious jewelry, listen to religious music, and read religious novels. We can buy coffee that helps people in Third World countries, watch religious television, and wear religious T-shirts. We can do church stuff. We can even have a fish on the back of our car without having a real hunger for doing what is right in God’s eyes.

You do know that people eat when they are not hungry, don’t you?

Some people eat because they are depressed, not because they are hungry.

We go to the movies and in addition to the price of the movie we spend ten dollars for popcorn and coke, not because we are hungry, but because we’ve been conditioned to eat popcorn at the movies.

So many times, we eat even when we are not hungry and it’s usually unhealthy food.

Many people have been conditioned to consume religion and the culture of religion that has nothing to do with a hunger for righteousness.

When we have a hunger and thirst for righteousness we have a desire to follow what God wants as best we can understand his direction through scripture and the Holy Spirit. This can be sacrificial. It can require us to be loving and kind to people we don’t like. It can mean making difficult choices.

Is your desire to do the right thing in God’s eyes as strong as your primary and secondary drives in your life?

Truthfully, Jesus might be the only one to have ever achieved that.

However, you do understand that Jesus wants us to maintain the kind of relationship with God where we have a craving that eagerly longs for our actions, thoughts, and attitudes to be acceptable to God?

Psalm 42:1-2 says, “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?”

Would you like for that verse to sum up the desires of your heart? Could you write that verse and sign your name by it?

If not, then I challenge you to come up with a plan so that your hunger and thirst for God will grow.

Right now, during this invitational hymn, why not reach out to God and tell God that you desire in your heart to do what is right and pleasing to him? The blessings of God awaits you.

I stand here to greet any of you who want to pray or make your decisions public today.

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