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Matthew 5:6 - 4th Beatitude



Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In this discourse, Steve Gregg highlights the fourth Beatitude of Jesus, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled." He emphasizes that this hunger and thirst are not just for material needs, but also for something spiritual, and those who are continually seeking righteousness and remain unsatisfied in the world are blessed. He encourages the listeners to strive for contentment and resignation to God's will, while still actively pursuing their high calling. Ultimately, Jesus is describing someone who is deeply hungry and thirsty for righteousness, and they will be blessed for their yearning.

Transcript

At the beginning of the section of Matthew that we call the Sermon on the Mount, which is in Matthew chapter 5, and it continues through chapters 6 and 7, we have, as an introduction to the sermon, eight statements by Jesus, which are usually referred to as the Beatitudes. Each of these begin by saying, Blessed are the, and then he states a category of persons, and he says, Because, or For, They Shall, or Do, and then he states some kind of privilege that they experience. And as we have been observing day by day as we've gone through these Beatitudes, and we are continuing today to do the same, every time Jesus stated that a certain group of people are blessed, it was not necessarily some group that we would obviously consider to be blessed, or enviable people.

And that is why, no doubt, he had to tell us, because we think otherwise than Jesus does, unless we are transformed by the renewing of our minds. And so Jesus, when he picked his twelve disciples, sat down with them and gave them this sermon, and among the first things he had to do was to recondition them in their thinking about what is enviable, what is desirable. Because people are sort of, well, I mean, I guess we'd have to say, inevitably, they're drawn in the direction of that which they consider to be enviable, or fortunate.

And so, in order to shape the lives and the careers of his disciples the right way, it was necessary to address, first of all, their value system, and the things that they valued and thought were good and desirable. And upon doing so, he was able to show them that

many things are to be envied, many things are to be desired, and many persons are fortunate, that the world would not necessarily think of in those terms. And that is what the Beatitudes do for us.

They redirect our thinking about what is desirable, who is fortunate, and what kind of people do we want to be. The description he's giving is a description, really, of those who are his disciples. If you want to be a disciple, these are the kinds of people you should be.

In each case, he attaches a certain privilege to the category, and that would, taken together, the eight Beatitudes and the eight things he says, give a composite picture of the blessedness of being a disciple, or of the blessings and rewards that come from following Jesus. Now, the first Beatitude was, blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. The second was, blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

The third was, blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. And today we come to the fourth Beatitude. This is found in Matthew 5 and verse 6, where Jesus said, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.

Now, being hungry and being thirsty are not necessarily states that are considered to be desirable. Most of us would rather have our stomachs full than to be hungry. Most of us would rather have all of our urges and our cravings sated, rather than to have unmet cravings.

And that's what hunger and thirst are. Hunger and thirst are cravings that have not yet been sated, not yet been satisfied. And therefore, when we talk of somebody being hungry, or someone being thirsty, whether we're talking about the hunger for physical food and physical drink, or whether we're talking, as Jesus is here, about the hunger of another sort, hunger for something non-material, something spiritual.

In any case, we're talking about somebody who has an unsatisfied desire. And an unsatisfied desire is usually what we equate with unhappiness. You know, Buddhism deals with the issue of human misery by saying that misery exists because of unsatisfied desire.

And, of course, part of the solution offered in Buddhism is that you limit your desires. You reduce yourself to the point of having no desires. If you have no desires, then you'll have no unsatisfied desires.

And if you have no unsatisfied desires, it is argued, you will be a happy person, or at least you'll be tranquil. Now, the assumption, therefore, is if you have desires, and these desires are not yet satisfied, then tranquility is not for you. Not at this point.

Not until those desires are satisfied. But Jesus, of course, told us the opposite. The

person who is hungry and thirsty for righteousness is a blessed or a happy person, an enviable person.

Now, he is not talking about the person who has hungered and thirsted and then obtained his object and then been satisfied. He's talking about them prior to the actual satisfaction of the craving. Because he says, for they shall be satisfied.

That's future. So, he's talking about a blessedness of persons who hunger for something that they have not yet acquired, at least not fully. But he says they are blessed because they will be satisfied.

Now, you might say, but I'd rather pursue a life that was not hungry or thirsty for anything. I don't like unsatisfied desire. I don't like having cravings that are not met.

And therefore, I don't want to be a person who hungers and thirsts for righteousness. Because I live in a world where there is no righteousness. And my own life is not characterized by seamless, righteous behavior.

Therefore, if I hunger and thirst for such things, I will be unsatisfied. Because those things aren't a reality. Righteousness is not part of this world.

There's no justice. There's no righteousness. Either in this world or in my own heart.

Or if there is, it certainly isn't perfect. And therefore, I'd just as soon learn to adjust to the level that things are at right now. And this is what, of course, in many cases, people do.

Not only non-Christians, but many Christians have adjusted. Unlike Lot, who lived in Sodom during a time of great depravity there, it says of him in 2 Peter 2 that he vexed his righteous soul day by day, seeing and hearing the unlawful deeds of those people. Now, he lived in Sodom, but he found much of the wickedness in Sodom to be very unsavory, to say the least.

It wrenched his spirit. It wrenched his soul to see this and to hear it day by day. Many Christians can't even say as much about their own spiritual state.

Many Christians can walk into a video store and see the covers of those videos full of lust and full of rejection of God's standards and rejection of righteousness. Can watch videos and hear blasphemies against God and see iniquity and adultery and all kinds of things. And can not only not be vexed by it, but can actually enjoy it, can kind of be entertained by it.

That's the opposite of Lot. And by the way, we don't think of Lot when we look at his life. He is not presented as a man who is exemplary.

If you want to choose an Old Testament character to be like, there are certainly better

examples than Lot you can choose. And yet, as unexemplary as Lot was, yet he was more righteous than many of us, because he lived in a society that was corrupt like our own. But he was annoyed by the wickedness.

He desired something better to exist. And a person who is hungry for righteousness and lives in Sodom or lives in San Francisco or lives in this world anywhere where there is great iniquity abounding, that person is going to, of course, not only be unsatisfied, but is going to be annoyed, is going to be irritated, is going to be tormented, as Lot was. And yet, although being tormented in your spirit seems like an undesirable state of mind, yet how much more undesirable is the state of mind that can live in Sodom and not react, not find it undesirable, not find it offensive? You see, if that is the case, then it means that the heart has succumbed.

The heart has accepted the sinful state of the world. And you'll find much of this in the church. There was a time, for example, where relationships between boys and girls, young men and young women in the church, would have been held to a high standard of morality, one where casual dating as we know it, and much of what goes on among Christians, even in dating situations, would have been considered outright immoral.

And rightly so. Much of what goes on is immoral among Christians in their dating and so forth, and shouldn't be done at all. But the church has come to the point where it's defined its deviancy downward to the point where we don't want to be too out of step with the world.

I mean, it used to be that a virtuous girl wouldn't kiss on the first date. Nowadays, it's rare, perhaps, at least maybe among non-Christians, I even think among those who profess to be Christians, to find a woman who won't sleep with a guy on the first date. We have seen total decay of our culture.

And the church, which is supposed to be a pillar of truth, a pillar and ground of the truth, as Paul said, the church which is supposed to be standing for righteousness and be a godly conscience to a corrupt world, the church doesn't really want to stand out like a sore thumb. The church doesn't want to go quite as far as the world. I think Christians generally know they're not supposed to do all the wicked things the world does.

But certainly, nowadays in many churches, behavior between young men and women is defined as acceptable so long as they don't have intercourse. And that's obviously a far cry from the morality of Scripture and a far cry from the morality that even the church stood for before the world became more corrupt. You see, the world seems to call the tune and the church dances.

Unfortunately, it's supposed to be the other way around. The church, at least, is supposed to be writing its own tune or following the tune that God has written, no matter what the world does. But if a person is a professing Christian, and they can go into a

video store and see all this corruption, they can watch television and the commercials and all the corruption, all the immodesty, all the materialism, all the greed, all the false values that are presented there, all the rebellion against God and against parents and so forth, they can see that and it doesn't wrench their righteous soul within them, then that person is not to be envied.

That person has gone spiritually dead. That person is backslidden in heart. And therefore, even though it is not a comfortable thing to be grieved and tormented by the sin in society, those who still have the spiritual sensitivity to experience that reaction are fortunate because it means they're still craving something better.

If you are not grieved to see sin in society or sin in your own life, it means that you have stopped craving anything better. You are satisfied with things the way they are. The problem is things are not at a satisfactory level with society.

And if we are satisfied with what is less than satisfactory, then we've lost touch with God and we've lost touch with righteousness. So those who still hunger and thirst for righteousness, unsatisfied as they are, grieved and tormented as they sometimes are in a wicked world, those persons are nonetheless blessed, there to be envied, certainly far more than those who've hardened themselves and calloused themselves and cooled down and become lukewarm and are no different than the world and are despised by the world for that very reason. Now, Jesus said, Blessed are you who hunger and thirst for righteousness because you will be satisfied.

Not necessarily ultimately, in the ultimate sense of satisfaction, you won't have that immediately. But you know, if you don't hunger and thirst for righteousness, it doesn't mean that you now have an option of hunger and thirsting for nothing. Everyone has something that drives them.

Everybody has some dominant desire in their life. Some people's dominant desire is simply to survive. Some have higher goals than that.

They want to be comfortable. They want to be well-known. They want to have pleasures unbridled.

They want to have money. I mean, they crave these things. Other people desire only to please God, and they desire that righteousness might prevail.

Whichever category you're in, you are not free from unfulfilled desire. All people have desires that dominate their personality, and all people have a measure of dissatisfaction in attaining those desires. If you want to please God always, and you want righteousness to prevail in the world and in your life, you will have a measure of attainment in that direction, and there will be some encouragement here and there, but you'll largely be unsatisfied as long as the world is in its present state.

But if you have no concern for God, no concern for righteousness, and your craving is to be loved and never rejected by anybody, or to be always comfortable, always healthy, always well-stocked with supplies and money, never in an accident, never have anyone cross your will, if that's what you desire, you're going to be unsatisfied too. The difference is that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness have the promise of God that there is a day coming in which they will be satisfied. The thing they are craving is going to happen.

The thing that is desired by them will be granted to them. You see, if what you crave is what God desires, and what God has determined ultimately to bring to pass, namely righteousness will fill the earth, as the Bible says it will, then if that's what you crave, then you will at least have the promise that what you crave will someday be satisfied, and it will be satisfied at that point forever. Now, if you desire something else, something that's out of line with what God desires for you, something that is not anything that God has guaranteed to come to pass, then you stand in a position to perhaps never be satisfied.

As I said, if you don't hunger and thirst for righteousness, it doesn't mean you'll hunger and thirst for nothing. You will desire something. Human beings by nature are driven by goals, driven by ambitions, driven by cravings, driven by desires and lusts, and whatever you crave will be the thing that dominates your happiness, for good or for evil.

Because if you crave something that you cannot obtain, or even if you obtain it, you find that you raise the bar a little more and you crave something beyond that, you will live a perpetually unsatisfied life. Now, it's possible that, you know, I'm not saying that Christians are the only ones who are satisfied. As a matter of fact, what I'm saying is that Christians, if they are rightly minded, are not satisfied at this point in their life.

Their satisfaction is put off for later. They shall be satisfied, Jesus said, if they hunger and thirst for righteousness sake. Now, it is possible, however, though unsatisfied, to experience contentment.

It's possible that you think of satisfaction and contentment as the same thing, but that's not necessarily the case. You see, satisfaction speaks of having all your cravings and all your desires sated or fulfilled. The thing you desire has been realized and there remains nothing more that you desire.

That's what the word being satisfied means. Certainly, Christians cannot hope to be satisfied in that sense until the end of time, until they, as the psalmist said, in Psalm 17:15, he said, I will be satisfied when I awake with your likeness. When I'm resurrected in the likeness of Christ, that's when I'll be satisfied.

Until then, I'm going to press on toward the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, as Paul said he did in Philippians chapter 3. There's still something more to attain.

Paul says it's not as if I were already perfect or had already attained, but this one thing I do, forgetting the things that are behind and looking on toward the things that are before, I press on toward the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. There's an unsatisfied man.

He is unsatisfied in that he's not yet perfect, but he wants to be. There is a high calling and a mark that he's still pressing on toward. That is dissatisfaction, but that satisfaction will be fulfilled in the day of Christ Jesus.

However, in the same epistle where Paul spoke of not being perfect yet, not being satisfied with where he was yet, he's got further to go, he also said in Philippians chapter 4, I have learned in whatever state I am in therewith to be content. Now, there's a difference then between being satisfied and being content, because being satisfied means that all that I have desired, I have realized, I have obtained. I have it.

My hunger has been sated. I've been hungry, but now I've had a full meal, and having had a full meal, I'm satisfied. Well, that's not the state of the Christian prior to the coming of Christ, but contentment is something else.

Contentment can exist even though I have unfulfilled desires. It happens by putting those desires in perspective. It comes from saying, although there are things I desire that I have not yet obtained, yet what I have now is what God wants me to have now, and I am pleased to be in His will.

I am pleased to have what pleases Him. I will accept from His hand and resign myself to whatever He wants me to have now. And so Paul said, whatever state I'm in, I have learned to be content.

That means being resigned to the will of God. I still desire more, but God has not chosen to bring us further along than this, so I will be pleased with the will of God for the time being, and then someday I will be fully satisfied when righteousness comes. Now, all of this is true if I am one who hungers and thirsts for righteousness.

If I hunger and thirst for wealth, for fame, for unbroken pleasure and no pain, if I want health that will never be interrupted with sickness, if these are the things I crave, if I want to live to be old and not die young, if those are the things I crave, there's no guarantee that I will realize them. There's no promise to those who hunger and thirst after such things as that, that they shall be satisfied, and therefore they are not fortunate people. What they desire they may attain in measure, or they may never attain it at all.

And in most cases, if they attain what they think they want, they will set their sights further out and say, well, I think I want more because this thing that I've gotten has not really proven totally satisfactory. Now, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness at

least have this consolation. There is a guarantee that the thing they crave will be realized, and then they will hunger and thirst for it no more.

In the meantime, of course, we are instructed to be content with such things that we have, to be pleased that God is on the throne, and that what we have has been sovereignly dictated to us by Him, and that in the meantime, while He's working His work in the earth and in our hearts, we are at the point He wants us to be. And to be pleased with the will of God is simply a function of loving God and being pleased to see Him pleased. And so that's what the Christian's attitude is.

Now, this mention of being hungering and thirsting for righteousness, you know, hunger and thirst are the most overwhelming cravings that humans can have. I realize that there's times of the day that you feel more of a craving for something else. There's times when you want nothing so much as to sleep, and you're not interested in eating, partly because you're not very hungry, but you are sleepy.

There's times when the drive for sex may seem stronger than the drive for food. But in general, there's no drive of the human condition that is more frequent and more demanding than the demand for food. However much you may crave sleep, however much you may crave sex, you will crave food more often, unless you, of course, continually feed yourself.

Most of us, if we say, well, the craving for food isn't my strongest craving, it's because we've never really been hungry. What Jesus is describing here is someone who's really hungry and thirsty. You go without water for three days, and you'll know what being thirsty is.

You go without food for a few weeks, and you'll know what being hungry is. Jesus fasted for 40 days, and it says, and was hungry. That's hunger.

We've never known that in our society, most of us. But it is a strong craving. In other words, it's not a casual interest in righteousness he's talking about.

It's talking about having a strong, dominating, craving, an overwhelming thirst to see God glorified and His righteousness exalted. Later in the same sermon, in Matthew 6, verse 33, Jesus said, Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. See, that's being hungry and thirsting for righteousness.

If you're seeking first, as your first priority in life, your primary, dominant desire is for the kingdom of God and His righteousness, then you are one of these people that Jesus describes who hungers and thirsts for righteousness. And the wonderful thing is that both the kingdom of God and His righteousness are guaranteed. The world will be filled someday with the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

And therefore, it is wise and enviable to be one of those who has set your heart on the

things of God. It requires that you experience dissatisfaction for the time being. But there is a guarantee that what you crave will be given later.

And when it is, you will enjoy it forever and never know dissatisfaction again. If you do not set your heart on the things of God, you will know dissatisfaction for eternity. Even if you obtain a temporal measure of satisfaction from obtaining the thing you desire, you will not, without God, have those things for all eternity.

And therefore, the person who hungers for the right things and is satisfied ultimately is certainly the fortunate man, the blessed man. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.