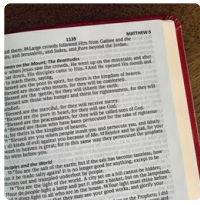


# OpenTheo

## Those Who Hunger And Thirst



### **The Beatitudes** - Steve Gregg

In this message, Steve Gregg explores the fourth beatitude from the Gospel of Matthew, which states, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled." Gregg explains that the hunger and thirst referred to here is not for physical sustenance, but rather for spiritual fulfillment through God. He examines various biblical passages that emphasize the importance of seeking righteousness and justice, and encourages his audience to strive for a deeper understanding of and relationship with God.

### **Transcript**

I'm studying the fourth beatitude in Matthew 5, and that would be found in verse 6. But I'm going to read all of them again as we did at the beginning of each session, just so we can be reminded of the total picture. Beginning in verse 3, Jesus said in Matthew 5, "...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. And 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." And these are the eight beatitudes given to us by Matthew.

Now, these beatitudes are, in a sense, we could say states of grace, in the sense that man's fallen heart does not naturally incline toward any of these. And it is a work of grace of God in the heart that causes a person to be poor in spirit and to mourn with a godly mourning, a godly sorrow that leads to repentance, to be meek, to hunger and thirst for righteousness. We're going to talk tonight about the hunger and thirsting for righteousness.

And I hope that it will become clear to you that it is absolutely essential that we have

this hunger in us if we are to be Christians of the sort that God or Jesus here describes as normative. Now, we must remember the original audience to whom Jesus spoke were a bunch of Jewish men, his disciples, and there were others around too because the hillsides were crowded with multitudes. It would seem that Jesus directed most of his comments to his disciples in this sermon.

And as such, it was they that he was referring to when he spoke of the poor in spirit and the mourners and the meek and the hungry and thirsty for righteousness and the rest of these things. These men were, we could say, the remnant of Israel. In every generation, the nation of Israel had its remnant, its sampling, its small group who were much smaller than the population of the nation itself, who were, in fact, what the nation was to be in principle, what the nation was supposed to be in theory, the people of God, a kingdom of priests, worshipers of Jehovah, the promulgators of the knowledge of God to the nations.

This is what the whole nation was called to be in the Old Testament. But in every generation, it was only a small portion of the nation of Israel that really fit the calling upon the nation. And these who did were those that are in the prophets referred to as the remnant.

The Psalms also refer to them as the remnant in the New Testament. They are sometimes referred to as the remnant, but usually when quoting from the Old Testament. But the remnant of Israel were the those in the nation whom God had touched and whom God had worked within them, a work of grace that made them aware and sensitive to their spiritual need.

Jesus said of those who fit that description, they were truly blessed. And certainly that is in contrast to those in Israel who were not of that remnant. In Luke's gospel, where we have also a set of beatitudes in Luke chapter six, we have not only four beatitudes, but we have four woes.

He says, blessed are you who are poor for years in the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now for you should be filled. Blessed are you who weep now for you shall laugh and blessed are you who are persecuted now for so did they persecute the prophets.

But then he followed that with woe unto you who are rich, for you have your reward. You have your consolation. He said, woe unto you who are full.

You shall be hungry. Woe unto you who laugh now for you shall mourn and weep, he said. And woe unto you when all men speak well of you.

There were in Israel two classes, the remnant who were the poor in spirit, the meek, the hungry for the things of God. And there were those who were not. And so it is in every

society today where the gospel has been preached and even probably where the gospel has not yet been preached.

I believe that all persons could be categorized as either one or the other. A person is either poor in spirit or he feels quite adequate, self-adequate, self-sufficient. A person is either mourning over his sins or he's making excuses to himself and rationalizing his sins.

A person is either meek and willing to yield to providence or else that person is always striving for his own way and asserting himself. A person is either endued with a hunger and a thirst, a craving after righteousness or else they're hungry for something else. A hunger, by the way, is a universal.

And we're not here talking, of course, about hunger for food, although in Luke's gospel, the beatitude sounds like it's just as those blessed are you who are hungry now, you should be filled. He didn't say hungry for righteousness. This is another of those examples where Matthew, in giving the beatitudes, gives a more spiritual slant than Luke does.

Luke has blessed are you poor. Matthew has blessed are the poor in spirit. Luke has blessed are you who are hungry now.

Matthew has blessed are you who hunger and thirst for righteousness. In Matthew's version, the beatitudes are more spiritual in nature. And either that is because Matthew is recording different beatitudes than Luke is recording or that Matthew is giving us the actual sense that Jesus meant by indicating that it's not so much being poor or being hungry that makes a person blessed.

It's a spiritual state, it's a state of grace. And not everyone has that. In fact, it's possible that some in this room don't have that.

I would say that even those who have it have probably ebbs and flows this hunger after righteousness. Now, there is a promise to those who hunger and thirst for righteousness and that is they shall be filled. They shall be satisfied.

They shall be sated. Now, when we're talking about hunger and thirst, but when we're not talking about literal hunger for food and thirst for water, we're talking about something analogous to hunger for food and thirst for water. We're talking metaphorically here.

Hunger and thirst for actual food and water is one of the most beneficial things that God has given us because if we never had a sense of hunger, we would forget to eat and we would very likely die. Eventually, we just forget, we neglect. If food was not appetizing and if we never felt any hunger pains for lack of it, we would probably just get busy with other things and just eventually just die.

A hunger is a benevolent thing that God has given to us so that we might remember and be aware of our need for something essential to our life. Likewise, the thirst. Now, Jesus said, quoting from Deuteronomy chapter eight, he said, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.

Man has need for more than just physical sustenance, just like we have need to eat for our body's sake. We have need to sustain us spiritually. There are spiritual needs, but not all people know they have spiritual needs, unlike physical hunger, which is universal to all people who are alive.

When they don't eat, they get hungry. When they have a need for food, they know it because they have this sensation called hunger, this sensation called thirst, which is like an alarm going off saying you need to eat something, you need to drink something. In the spiritual realm, that hunger is not universal.

Not everybody senses that. Everybody has a need spiritually, just like everybody has a need physically, but not everyone is as aware of it. There's not the same alarm bells going off in everybody who lacks this.

That's why it's such a blessing to be one of those who does hunger and thirst for righteousness, because this is to have an awareness of my need, just like being a beggar in spirit in the first beatitude. This is a sense that I feel a vacuum. And not only is it a vacuum, but it is a hunger and a thirst.

And Jesus could not have chosen better words to indicate a raging, obsessive craving, because that's really what hunger and thirst is. Once you go without food and water long enough, you go without water for three days and you'll treasure a glass of water more than a pound of gold. You'd sell a bag of gold for a glass of water if you'd gone three days without water and didn't have any other way of getting water at a cheaper price.

You'd pay it because your body would be screaming for water. You'd die shortly after that if you didn't get water. You'd have a raging thirst if you're out in the middle of the desert and there was no water available.

You'd give anything for water or for food if you'd come to the end of your resources and your body was dying for lack of food. There is this mechanism built in that causes this loud alarm, this craving, this obsession. I mean, when you don't get very hungry, some people get obsessed with it.

If you ever fasted for a day or two or three, if you fast for a day or two, your body's not in trouble. But you may feel like it is. You may think it is because your body's not in our country.

We're not accustomed to hunger. We're not accustomed to going without even two meals in a row. Some people miss a meal because they're too busy, but not usually too.

And therefore, our bodies never really experience the sensation of hunger like some people do. But if you go a day or two without food, your body will know what it means to be hungry. And even though you're not seriously in trouble at that point, you will know that your mind becomes distracted by food.

Unless you have to actually strongly discipline your mind to prevent it, because if you're hungry, the most natural thing to come to your mind is eating. If you're thirsty, the most natural thing to come to your mind is drinking. And whenever you are not forcibly making yourself think of something other than that, your mind will naturally go to that which you're craving.

Now, this is a metaphor for a state of heart. For a person lacking righteousness or living in a society that lacks righteousness, craves righteousness so much so that when he's not forced to think about something else, his mind is always on this quest for righteousness, this absence of righteousness. It's a continual irksomeness like Lott, who in second Peter, chapter two is called Righteous Lot, who is in Sodom.

It says he vexed his righteous soul from day to day with the unlawful deeds of those people. He lived in a world without righteousness and he was vexed by it as if he lived in a world without food. And he wasn't even the godliest man of his generation.

That's a fact. But he was godly enough to really sense this this grief over the absence of righteousness in his society. Now, the concept of being hungry and thirsty for the things of God arises in the Old Testament, just like all the Beatitudes.

Really, I can't think of any of the Beatitudes in this list that Jesus gives that do not have their roots and their precursor in some statement in the Old Testament. We saw, for example, when we took the last third Beatitude, blessed are the meek, they shall inherit the earth. Well, there's a statement right other Psalms, the meek shall inherit the earth.

Likewise, here, the idea of hungry and thirsting for righteousness and being satisfied, having that thirst quenched is a concept brought up frequently in the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms and in Isaiah. Frequent motif in the scripture of the Old Testament. I'd like to show it to you because Jesus, when he spoke to these Jewish listeners, spoke in terms that they would not find foreign or novel.

He was addressing something that had been addressed in their scriptures with which they were well familiar in Psalm 143. Actually, let me look at these in a different order, if I might. In Psalm 42 verses one through three.

David said, as the deer pants for the water books, so my soul pants for you, oh God, my soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my food day and night while they continually say to me, where is your God? He says, I pant after God like a deer panting for the water books. I don't know deer

very well.

I don't know much about wildlife, but I've been told that deer generally don't pant until they're dying of thirst. Generally, when they've been pursued and they've had no opportunity to drink and they've used up all their moisture, then you may see a deer panting for water, but it's not all that common. The idea is it's desperate.

There's a desperation there. Desperate for water, a deer panting for water. So that's how my heart pants for you.

Does that shame you to hear that a man, even in the old Testament, had such a heart after God? And yet we are so shamefully apathetic. I speak primarily for myself. I can't really say maybe some of you have a heart after God that's greater than that of David's, but I must say that I cannot describe my continuous attitude as one of panting after God as David speaks of here.

And the worst of it is I can think of a time when I did continually. I can think of an earlier time in my life where that was constant, where it was my only thought. And if I was ever forced to think about something else, my thoughts always came back to seeking God, getting closer to God, getting to know God.

It was like an obsession. It still is to some extent, but I guess maybe it's been sated to a certain extent, too. I mean, once you've been what Jesus said, if you're hungry and thirst, you'll be filled.

I guess once you've been filled, you don't feel quite so hungry. But at the same time, you don't get just filled once. A relationship with God is an ongoing thing, and it's possible to drift from an earlier closeness to God and not realize it.

It's not so much that you're not hungry. It's just that you've lost your sensation of hunger. You may be lacking the nourishment that you once had, but you are not sensing that it's possible.

And David had not lost that at this point in his life, whether he did at a later time is hard to say in his later life. He did have a lot more complications. That makes you wonder sometimes.

But certainly at that point in his life, he panted for God. Likewise, in Psalm 63 and verse one, David says, Oh, God, you are my God. Early will I seek you.

My soul thirsts for you. My flesh longs for you in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water. And in verse five, he says, My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth shall praise you with joyful lips.

I said, I'm thirsting, but I will be satisfied. Jesus said, Blessed are those who hunger and

thirst for righteousness. They shall be filled or they should be satisfied.

David knew that his soul thirsted for God as in a dry and thirsty land, like a man in the desert without water. He thirsts for God. Now, if you turn to Psalm 143, you'll find that David didn't just say he thirsted like a man who's in a dry and thirsty land.

He said he thirsts like a dry and thirsty land does. He likened his own soul to a desert needing watering. In Psalm 143 and verse six, David said, I spread out my hands to you.

My soul longs for you or in King James, I think it says thirst for you like a thirsty land. Maybe it's longs. But the idea is my soul is like a thirsty land, like a dry desert land.

Now, the saddest thing about us is that with many of us, the same is true of us, except that we don't know it because that primal hunger for God and for righteousness is often put off by distraction. In fact, I dare say that some of us who have hungered much for God at earlier times of our lives and don't sense that hunger anymore, it may be not because we've been satisfied, but because we've been distracted. Jesus told the parable about seed falling on soil where there is thorns.

He said, this is the man who hears the word of God and it takes root and springs up, begins a good start. But he says, before long, the thorns and thistles come up. He said, these are the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches.

You know, the devil does not want us to have a lively hunger and thirst after the things of God. He wants to temporally satisfy that unsatisfied state of mind that we would naturally have. And sometimes he manages to do it.

You know, people in the world say, well, the things the world don't satisfy. Well, I think they probably do to a certain extent. They satisfy some people.

I realize that when people get saved and they give their testimony and say, well, I tried drugs and I tried alcohol and I tried sex and I tried money and I tried this and that and the other thing. And none of those things satisfied. I will agree.

I'll accept that. I believe that's probably true. I haven't tried all those things myself and I don't intend to.

But but I would accept that testimony is genuine. But as I look around, it seems like there are a lot of people who do find those things satisfying enough, enough that they've stopped being aware of any thirst. They've stopped thirsting.

They've stopped seeking. They're not aware of any absence. They're not aware that there's a vacuum inside.

Now, with Christians, it's not that they're going to go off into drugs and alcohol, hopefully, or illicit sex or anything like that. But Christians do get drawn aside after

material things. Chasing this materialistic goal or or another, they get distracted by entertainment.

It's so easy. At a time when you'd otherwise be inclined to maybe sit down and open the Bible or pray, it's easier to just sit down and turn on the remote control and channel for a while. Before there was TV, I'll bet Christians read their Bibles a lot more than they do now.

But it's so much easier just to be stimulated, to be entertained. And that sense of hunger after God becomes numbed, not because it has been filled, not because we have found all there is to find of God or righteousness, but because we have numbed our senses by filling it with something else. When I'm hungry for food, if I would fill my stomach with dirt, I wouldn't feel hungry anymore.

If I'd fill my stomach with gravel, I wouldn't feel hungry anymore. Or with carpeting, that hunger would go away real quick. But I'd still starve to death.

It's simply that I'd be filling that hunger with the wrong thing. Now, David was a thirsty land and he knew it and his soul thirsted for God, his heart thirsted after God. And that thirst is certainly a good thing to have when you're dry.

Because you can die without thirst. That is, if you don't know you're thirsty and you and you numb it and you don't know it's there anymore and you don't therefore seek to satisfy it further. In the book of Isaiah, there's, as you can see from the notes I've given you, a lot of scriptures that relate to a topic that Isaiah brings up again and again.

And it always has to do with the Messiah coming. And of course, he has come and I believe these scriptures are now fulfilled. But in Isaiah, one of the motifs that characterize his book a lot are those of a desert land becoming watered and fruitful.

If you've read Isaiah any time recently, you know what I'm talking about. It comes up again and again and again and again throughout the book. It's a desert land, rivers break out in the desert, the land gets watered, it becomes fruitful, fills the earth with its fruit and so forth.

This is all imagery that talks about a spiritual condition. How do I know? Because Isaiah himself tells us so. And so does Jesus.

But let me show you some of the passages where this sets a backdrop for the Beatitudes we're talking about. In Isaiah chapter forty five and verse eight, Isaiah prays for rain as it were, but not literal rain. So rain down, you heavens from above and let the skies pour down righteousness.

Why? He's a thirsty land and he's hungry and thirsty for righteousness. Let the rain of righteousness come. Let the clouds pour out righteousness, he says.



Let the earth open and let them bring forth salvation and let righteousness spring up together. I, the Lord, have created it. So here's a prayer from a thirsty land, hungry and thirsty for righteousness, crying out for the rain of righteousness to come pouring down into water that thirsty land, that thirsty soul.

In chapter sixty four of Isaiah, verses one through five, Isaiah said, Oh, that you would rend the heavens, that you would come down, that the mountains might shake at your presence as fire burns brushwood, as the fire causes water to boil. You make your name known, excuse me, to make your name known to your adversaries, that the nations may tremble at your presence. But you did awesome things for which we did not look.

You came down, the mountains shook at your presence. For since the beginning of the world, men have not heard nor perceived by the ear, nor has the eye seen any God besides you who acts for the one who waits for him. You meet him who rejoices and does righteousness, who remembers you in your ways.

You are indeed angry, for we have sinned in these ways. We continue and we need to be saved. Now, notice he cries out for the heavens be rended and something to come pouring down.

Earlier he identified what it was in chapter forty five. He wants righteousness to come pouring down. He wants the clouds, as it were, he wants a cloudburst of righteousness to water the land, to water the souls of his people.

Why? Because God meets those who do righteousness, he says in verse five. So this man wants to meet with God. Isaiah wants God to meet him.

So he wants to be one of those who does righteousness. He's hungering for that outpouring of righteousness in the land and in his own heart. But the fulfillment comes in Christ.

If you look at Isaiah chapter thirty five and verse seven, this is a messianic chapter. It's a vision that Isaiah had and it fits into a certain category of visions. Isaiah has a lot of these.

One of them is in chapter two. Another is found in chapter eleven. Another is here.

Another is in chapter fifty four and fifty five. Another is found in chapter sixty one. And they're all the way through these visions of the age of the Messiah.

And they're written, I believe, in figurative language to a large extent. They're poetic. It's poetry.

And it says in chapter thirty five, verse seven, the parched ground. Remember, my soul thirst for thee like a parched ground, like a thirsty land. The parched ground shall

become a pool and the thirsty land springs of water in the habitation of jackals, meaning a wilderness.

Where each lay there shall be grass with reeds and rushes, just like there is by river banks. In other words, that which was a barren desert will be flowing with water. Now, the thirsty land, which is the soul of the person who thirsts after God, shall be watered.

Now, if you think this is literal, that's OK. I don't believe it's literal, but if it is literal, it nonetheless also gives the background for the spiritual thing that we're talking about. But I don't believe it is literal.

I believe he's talking about something spiritual. We'll see why in a moment. I'll show you some scriptures that say so.

In Isaiah sixty one, verse eleven through chapter sixty two, verse two, Isaiah said, for as the earth brings forth its bud, as the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth, so the Lord will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all nations. For Zion's sake, I will not hold my peace for Jerusalem's sake. I will not rest until her righteousness goes forth as brightness and her salvation as a lamp that burneth.

The Gentiles shall see your righteousness and all things your glory. All kings are going to me. You shall be called by a new name.

That's the name Christian, I believe, which is which the mouth of the Lord will name. Now, this is, again, talk about the messianic blessings, but notice the imagery as the earth brings forth, but and the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth. So it's not like anything in the New Testament.

There's a lesser known parable of Jesus found in Mark chapter four. He said the king of gods, like a man who sowed seeds in the field, then he goes, he sleeps and he wakes and he sleeps. And he says the ground of itself produces fruit first, the blade, then the ear, then the full corn and the full grain in the ear.

Jesus makes the point the ground itself, even when the man sleeping produces the grain. He's echoing this passage, the earth brings forth its bud, the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth. So the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth.

And so Isaiah says, I'm not going to rest until that happens. For Zion's sake, I'm going to keep prevailing on God. I'm going to lay hold on God.

I'm hungry for this. I'm thirsty for this. I desire this and I'm not going to give out any rest until this happens, till righteousness goes forth as brightness.

And when the Gentiles see that righteousness, that is when, of course, they they come

to the Lord. In Isaiah, chapter fifty five and verse one, he says, oh, everyone who thirsted. Come to the waters.

And you who have no money come by and eat. Now, those who thirst, there's some invitations in the New Testament to those who thirst also there in the Gospel of John and in Revelation, Jesus extends them. We'll look at those in a moment.

But Isaiah is the one who first appeals to those who thirst, but he's not talking about thirst for water here. He says, buy this without money. This is this is sustenance.

This is something of value to you that you can get for free from God. It's all of grace. Now, in chapter thirty two, we begin to get an idea of what all this imagery is pointing to.

And Isaiah thirty two verses 15 through 17 says until the spirit is poured out upon us from on high and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field and the fruitful field is counted for a forest. Then justice will dwell in the wilderness and righteousness will remain in the fruitful field. The work of righteousness will be peace and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever.

How can anyone ever doubt that this is fulfilled in Christ now? Isn't that that the work of righteousness will be peace? Isn't that exactly what Paul said in Romans five one, therefore, being justified by faith? We have peace with God. Why? Because it's the effect of righteousness. We've justified.

We're made righteous. So this is a prediction of the messianic age, which has come, which we are enjoying if we're Christians. And he speaks of it as the time of the spirit is poured out.

That happened at Pentecost. But notice until the spirit is poured out and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field. My soul, a thirsty land, a wilderness, a barren wilderness.

When the spirit is poured out upon me like this in the wilderness, then my soul becomes fruitful. The fruit of the spirit is brought forth there. You see, this imagery of the wilderness becoming fruitful in Isaiah is spiritual.

It relates to what Christ has done and has provided for us who were thirsty. And Isaiah forty four three, it could hardly be more clear. He says, for I am the Lord, your God.

See, that's forty three, three, forty four, three says, for I will pour water on him who is thirsty and floods on the dry ground. I will pour my spirit on your descendants and my blessing on your offspring. Notice I'll pour out water on the dry ground.

What do you mean by that? My spirit, I'm going to prompt my spirit. Now, Jesus, in John, chapter seven, stood up at the Feast of Tabernacles and he made this announcement. He said, if anyone thirst, let him come unto me and he that believes on me, as the

scripture has said.

Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. And then John adds this little note of explanation of verse three. Now he says, this spake he of the Holy Spirit, who is not yet given because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Jesus said out of that believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water. John said, that's the Holy Spirit is talking about. The Holy Spirit is this river who comes on this.

Jesus said, if anyone's thirsty, I said, whoever thirsts, come to the water. It's the same idea. The thirsty land, the soul that is dying and fruitless because it is for lack of spiritual.

Water. There's the promise, both in the Old Testament and the new, that God will pour out his spirit, will pour out water on this barren land. In Romans eight, four, Paul said that the righteous requirements of the law.

Might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh, but who walk according to the spirit righteousness. We walk according to the spirit, the righteous requirements of law are fulfilled in us. The thirst for righteousness is fulfilled to those who receive the spirit.

OK, now that is that the theme runs through the Old New Testament. Now, all people. Hunger and thirst for something.

Those who do not have a sense of hunger after God have a hunger for something, they go after the money, they got the women, they got the prestige or fame, power. A lot of people in Washington, D.C., who have nothing they hunger for so much as power, money. Yeah, they'd like that too, but power is even more important.

They'd probably sell everything they have and give all their money for power. People hunger for something because people are made with a void inside that they're trying to fill with something and it can be very misdirected. Our hearts are made to be set upon something.

We have affections to set on something. In Colossians 3, 1, Paul says, do not set your affections on things of the earth, but set them on things above. We we will crave one thing or another.

Jesus said, happier you if what you crave is righteousness. Why? Because you will be filled. What if you crave something else? Ridiculously, they asked you, Solomon tried all that.

He tried sex, alcohol, parties, music, learning money. He tried everything that people go after. Save your time.

He tells you what it's like. It's all vexation of spirit, striving after the wind. He said, it's

empty.

It's vanity. It's like striving after the wind. What's the same? It's not really all that satisfying.

Now, some people seem to come to a place where maybe they're easily satisfied, where they get all the money they want and they're quite happy. They get all the women they want and they're quite happy. They get all the drugs they want and they're quite happy.

Or at least they convince themselves they are and they convince everyone else they are. There probably is something inside of it that's not exactly happy. But the fact of the matter is, even if some do, that's a temporal satisfaction.

It won't last forever. It won't last into eternity. But righteousness endures into everlasting life.

Bodily exercise profits a little. But godliness profits in this life and in the age to come. And so blessed is the person whose hunger drives him to pursue after righteousness.

Because that person will have total and complete and infinite satisfaction. There's no promise like that attached to any other hunger. You hunger for money? There's no guarantee you'll ever get enough to make you satisfied.

You love food? There's no guarantee that you'll always have as much food as you'd like or the kind of food you like. There's everything else that you might seek, you might find, but there's a possibility you won't. But if you seek hard after righteousness, you pursue after righteousness, it is a guarantee you will find it.

You'll be satisfied and you'll be among the few on earth who actually can be described as satisfied people. In 1 John chapter 2 verses 15 through 17, John said, Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. For if any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life is not of the father, but of the world. And the world passes away and the lust thereof. But he that does the will of God abides forever.

To love, to crave, to seek, to hunger for things of the world, it's a conditioning that anyone can do. Even if you're very spiritual, you can, in a matter of time, make a few bad choices, you can crave the things of the world. You can backslide in your heart.

It's been done a thousand times, a million times probably. But don't. It's a fatal attraction, it's an obsession toward that which is temporal and will not bring satisfaction and in many cases will, in fact, bring death.

As in Isaiah 55, 1 and 2, which we looked at Isaiah 55, 1 a moment ago, says, Ho,

everyone who thirsts, come to the waters, and he that has no money, come, buy and eat. And verse 2 says, Why do you spend your money on that which is not bread, and your labor on that which does not satisfy? Well, people do that a great deal. They spend their money, they spend their labor, they spend their time.

On what? Well, in many cases, something that doesn't satisfy. But those who are thirsty, there is something promised to those that does satisfy. In Proverbs, we're warned about setting our affections or our tastes on anything other than righteousness.

In Proverbs 10, verse 2, it says, Treasures of wickedness profit nothing, but righteousness delivers from death. Many people desire treasures. That's what they hunger for.

Security, financial security, or comfort, or all those things money can buy. But money cannot buy, at least not for everyone, even those who have a great deal of it, total satisfaction. And it will not deliver them from death, they'll die.

Righteousness delivers from death. You say, well, Steve, you're trying to tell me that if you're righteous, you'll never die. No, you will die, but you'll be delivered from death.

You'll be raised again in the resurrection of the righteous, and you'll live forever. Righteousness does deliver from death. And in many cases, I'm sure Solomon had in mind, even in this life, you can escape premature death by living righteously.

In Proverbs 11, verse 19, it says, As righteousness leads to life, so he who pursues evil pursues it to his own death. Righteousness, hunger and thirst for righteousness, because that leads to life. Pursuing after evil, hungering and thirsting and pursuing after that, leads to death.

Obviously, there's one of those two options more blessed than the other, and Jesus told us which one. Most people on the earth hunger to be happy. That's really what they want.

If they could just be happy, they'd be happy. Right? And they won't be happy until they're happy. All they want is to be happy.

By definition, happiness is what makes you happy. And so, people are always seeking to be happy. And they try to be happy by this or that or another route.

But happiness is not to be found by seeking happiness. Happiness, Jesus said, is found by seeking righteousness. Happy are those who hunger and thirst, not for happiness.

Happy are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. They will be happy. They will be fulfilled.

Because they're not making happiness their goal. A.W. Tozer said, if I can only have truth

or happiness, give me truth, I'll have eternity to be happy. But it's not even that kind of a trade-off.

You can either pursue after righteousness or happiness. If you pursue righteousness, you will be happy. If you pursue happiness, you might be.

You might not be. No guarantees there. Some people who don't pursue righteousness become happy people.

I think an overwhelmingly larger number don't. But even as I say, the happiness is short-lived. Jesus said in Matthew 6, verse 33, But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

And all these things will be added unto you. The other things that you would ordinarily seek, you don't have to seek them. Just seek his kingdom and seek his righteousness.

Hunger for righteousness. And you will find happiness in that barn. Well, what is righteousness? Let me, real quickly if I can, give you some biblical background on what righteousness is.

It really has three principal meanings to the Christian. The first and most important meaning of righteousness is right-standing with God. To be on good terms with God.

For God to say you are righteous is what we call justification. Actually, justification is just a legal word. It means acquittal.

We use the word acquittal more often in a court of law. Someone is accused of a crime. They stand before the judge.

Their fate is in his hands. They go to the electric chair. They walk out free and clear without any guilt or anything over their head.

They hope for acquittal. Because acquittal means the judge says you are not guilty. That's what righteousness means in the first instance.

That God declares that you are not guilty. That's acquittal before God as opposed to condemnation. Or what we call being condemned in court.

Or we say convicted in court. But when God says I do not find any fault with you. I declare that you are righteous.

You are innocent. You are not guilty. That is righteousness.

That is justification. And to the Christian, to all people really, that's the greatest thing they need. Justification is for God to declare them righteous.

And justification is simply God saying you are righteous. Now, how is this obtained?

Really quite easily. Well, I don't know about easily.

Simply. There is a difference between simple and easy. Simple is uncomplicated.

But it might be hard to do if it goes against our grain to do it. But justification comes by having a faith of the same species as that faith which Abraham had. It is said of Abraham in Genesis 15, 6, that Abraham believed in the Lord and it, that is his believing, was imputed to him for righteousness.

As God counted it on his ledger as if he was a righteous man because he believed. That scripture is quoted frequently in the New Testament, usually by Paul. But also by James.

And I think even the writer of Hebrews, whoever that might have been, Paul too. But it is a commonly quoted verse in the New Testament because it presents the basis, the foundation for the doctrine of justification by faith. By putting our trust in Jesus, not declaring our own righteousness, declaring ourselves unrighteous.

Like the poor in spirit, like those who mourn. Declaring ourselves to be wretched, miserable. God be merciful to me a sinner.

By not justifying ourselves, then we obtain justice, justification from God, righteousness. This is what Paul said in that verse I mentioned earlier, Romans 5, 1. Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God. How could you not be happy if you have peace? Especially peace with God.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Finding this right standing with God is the first thing that a person must crave. And in that, the person who craves that is not even so much craving righteousness in the fuller sense of that meaning, not yet.

They may not even have a very developed or sophisticated understanding of what righteousness is. They just know they're not right with God and getting right with God is going to be the thing that they make the first order of business. That's what they crave.

There are people who simply will not rest until they know that they're right with God. And thank God that some of us have been those people. Because if you will settle for something less than being right with God, the devil knows your price and he'll pay it.

But as I said, if you're in a desert and you haven't drunk water for three days and you got a glass of water, if someone offered you a bag of gold for it, you wouldn't sell it for that. You wouldn't sell it for anything. What will a man give in exchange for his life? Jesus said, you know, to be right with God is man's chief need.

The great tragedy is how many people there are who have no sense of that need, no hunger. It's like they're starving to death for lack of that which they need most. And yet



they have no sense.

It's like a person who's some some strange thing has happened to their body. They don't hunger for food, although they haven't eaten any and need it. Well, that's the first thing that righteousness is being right standing with God.

Secondly, though, it is more than that. Righteousness is a form of conduct. Righteousness means doing the right thing, doing what is good, doing what is virtuous.

It has to do with personal behavior, personal integrity of character. When it comes to the New Testament teaching us on this, there's probably no verse better in my mind than 1 John chapter 3 and verse 7. And many evangelicals need to hear this verse and pay attention to it because I think many evangelicals act as if it isn't true. John said in 1 John 3, 7, Little children, let no one deceive you.

He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as he that is Christ is righteous. Christ is righteous. Who else is righteous? The person who practices righteousness.

Now, you might say, well, I thought I was righteous by what I believe, not what I practice, not what I do. Well, it's true. You are declared righteous by what you believe.

But if you are now truly righteous, it will be evident by the fact that you will practice righteousness. You see, when you believe savingly, and there is such a thing as believing otherwise than that. A lot of people believe in God and aren't saved.

But when you believe in such a way that brings genuine salvation, it brings something called regeneration. A new heart is given. The heart of flesh is put in the place of the heart of stone.

And that new heart is oriented toward righteousness. And therefore, you can tell those who have been justified by faith, genuinely, not by pretense or claim only, but who really have, by the fact that they do righteousness. Don't be deceived, John says.

To have some other opinion than this is to live in deception. The person who practices righteousness, that is the righteous person. But he's not declared righteous because he practices it.

He demonstrates that he is righteous, which God has made him to be, by practicing righteousness. Righteousness is the symptoms. Doing what is righteous is the symptom of having the disease of righteousness, which is no disease at all, of course.

But the idea is there is a fruit that comes from a root. If the root is righteous, the fruit will be righteous. If you are declared and truly made righteous by God, then it will be evident in your right conduct.

I give a lot of verses, actually, in your notes. I don't have time to give them all right now

in the lecture. But in verse 10 of this same chapter, 1 John 3, 10, he says, In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil.

That is, it's revealed. Who's the child of God and who's the child of the devil? Well, that's an interesting test to know. How do you know? It's quite easy, really.

Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. He's of the devil. You can tell the children of God from the children of the devil.

The children of God have been born of God. How can you tell they've been born of God? They practice righteousness. If they don't practice righteousness, they weren't born of God.

It's that simple. This teaching that you just can say a sinner's prayer and suddenly you get salvation, it makes no impact on your behavior, it doesn't change you in any way, is a false doctrine. It was never accepted by anyone in the early church except for heretics who were rebuked by the apostles.

It is accepted by many today in what is sometimes called the evangelical church, but fortunately not all. But the idea of Scripture is that righteousness is not just getting in right standing with God, it has the outflow of being a righteous person. Why? Because you love God.

That is what it means to be in right standing with God. You love God and he loves you. You've got a relationship going on.

And if you love somebody, you don't want to displease them. If you love God, you want to do what pleases him, and it grieves you to see yourself stumble again and again and again into that behavior that you know brings him grief. And that makes you hunger more for more righteousness.

I want to be more righteous than I am. You know, the evangelical church sometimes is guilty of trying to teach people to be satisfied with little. In fact, I've heard people say, don't even try to be good.

That insults the grace of God. What a bizarre teaching that is. The grace of God teaches us to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.

How can it be an insult to the grace of God for me to try to be good, for me to try to do what God has told me to do? So long as I'm not trusting in my performance for my salvation, I'm trusting in the mercy of God, I'm trusting in the sacrifice of Christ. It's the trusting in him that declares me righteous. But now that I am, I crave to do what is right.

I want to do what's right in the sight of God. If I don't, then I probably don't have a new heart yet. I'm probably not really saved yet.

I can say that I'm righteous in the sight of God, but if I don't do righteous, I'm deceived about it. Because he that practices righteousness is righteous. Don't be deceived about that, says the Bible.

Of course, the righteousness that God desires is in the heart, not only in the outward practice. Jesus said, unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. In Matthew 5.20, how can your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees? They were professional righteous people.

They kept the law far more scrupulously than anyone else in Israel. How could anyone have more righteousness than them? And yet Jesus said, unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Well, how can you do that? Quite simply, all you have to be is sincere about it, and you have more righteousness than they did.

Why? Jesus goes on and talks about it. They did their alms to be seen by men. They prayed on the street corners to be seen by men.

They just figured their faces when they fasted to be seen by men. They didn't have any sincerity. All their righteous deeds they did to be seen by men.

All you have to be is sincere, and your righteousness will exceed theirs. All you have to do is really want to be right in the sight of God, and really want to do it right before God from your heart. In other words, your righteousness cannot exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees in terms of incidences of righteous behavior, but you can exceed theirs in terms of depth.

Theirs was skin deep. Yours has to be deeper than that, or you'll not inherit the kingdom of God. You've got to be righteous in your heart.

You've got to have the right cravings, the right desires. You've got to have the right motivations. It's got to be in your heart, not just outwardly.

Righteousness, a hunger for righteousness, also is manifested in an intolerance for sin. It is said of Jesus in a Messianic Psalm, Psalm 45 and verse 7, it says, You have loved righteousness and hated iniquity. Therefore, God, your God, has anointed thee with the oil of gladness above your fellows.

Notice, you've loved righteousness, you've got the oil of gladness. Happy is he who hungers and thirsts for righteousness. Jesus was the first happy guy in his generation to come along.

He hungered and thirsted for righteousness. He loved righteousness and got anointed with the joy of the oil of gladness. But what else is the other part of that? You've hated

iniquity.

Those who love righteousness must hate iniquity. If you love your children, you must hate the cancer that destroys them. You cannot be neutral.

If you love some things, you will hate those things that are contrary to them. And you'll find plenty of intolerance for sin in the apostles, in Jesus, and in David in some of the Psalms. You read Psalm 101 sometimes, and he's very intolerant of sin.

In Psalm 106, verses 30 and 31, we're reminded of Phinehas, the priest in the book of Numbers, who when there was immorality going on in the camp, he took a javelin, he went into the tent, and he thrust the javelin through this Jewish man who was having an illicit relationship with a Midianite woman, killed them both. And God congratulated him and said, well done, way to go. Now what it says actually in Psalm 106 about Phinehas, in verse 30 and 31, it says Phinehas did what he did and stopped the plague, and then it says, therefore it was counted to him for righteousness.

Interesting. He was righteous, but his righteousness was seen in the fact that he was intolerant of the sin that was going on, that other people were letting go by unchecked. There's another aspect of righteousness that the person who is a Christian ought to be craving, and that is social justice.

Now the very suggestion of social justice automatically in the minds of some probably throws me into a category, liberal, social gospel, you know. Only liberals care about social justice. Well, that's not so.

Jesus cared about social justice. The prophets cared a great deal about social justice. The word justice and righteousness are the same word in the Hebrew.

And God craves social justice. Justice in that sense refers to two things, an end of oppression. In the Old Testament there's much complaint that the rich oppressed the poor, that the rich were able to get their way because they could bribe the judges and the magistrates would defer to the rich and the poor would just get walked all over.

That's not right. That's oppression. And the person who loves God will long for the day when that oppression ceases.

We crave the righteousness that is described in Psalm 103 and verse 6 where it says, the Lord executes righteousness and judgment for those who are oppressed. God will vindicate those who are oppressed. Why? Because God exercises righteousness.

Righteousness is ultimately someday the end of all oppression. In Isaiah 5, 7, God spoke of Israel as a vineyard from whom he looked for fruit. And he said he came looking for justice.

That's the fruit he was looking for. I came looking for justice, but there was a cry. I came looking for righteousness, but there was oppression.

Oppression is the opposite of justice. God hungers for righteousness, but he finds oppression. The day will come, though, when he and we who hunger for it will see a day when Jesus reigns on earth.

There will be justice then. There will be no oppression. But also an end of inequity.

Inequity is where people are treated differently because of their social class, maybe their race, maybe their gender. Inequity. Now, let me make this very clear.

I do believe there are different roles and different callings for people in different classes and different races and different genders sometimes. But that doesn't mean that some people are degraded, deprived of honor, deprived of civil rights, and so forth, without that being an injustice. God is concerned about justice.

There's many scriptures in the Bible about it. In Psalm 82, verses 2 through 4, God rebukes the judges of Israel because they did neglect this. They did not plead the cause of the poor, once again, because the rich could bribe them.

The rich could grease the palms of the judge, and the judge said, whatever you want, I'll say. And the poor person couldn't match that, and so the complaints that the poor had against the rich always got unredressed. And that made God very angry.

There are many scriptures in the Prophets and the Psalms about that. So, to hunger and thirst for righteousness, first of all, means I hunger and thirst to be in right relationship with God. Secondly, I hunger and thirst to be a more righteous person than I am.

And thirdly, I desire and crave, and I may even work toward, certainly will live in accordance with the standards of social justice. I will not be a perpetrator of injustice and of oppression and inequity. Now, there is evidence that this hunger exists in you.

One is that you pray for it. That you pray for the rain of justice to come down. In Zechariah 10.1, I don't have time to read all these verses.

I wish I could look them all up. But in Zechariah 10.1, there's a promise. Ask the Lord for the rain in the time of the latter rain, and the Lord will make flashing clouds.

He will give them showers of rain, grass in the field for everyone. We know what that's talking about because Isaiah talked about that. God will pour out from the clouds righteousness.

That's what was prayed for there. We're certainly not just praying for water. In repentance, we can see hunger and thirst for righteousness.

If you hunger and thirst for righteousness, you will repent when you sin. Hosea 10.12 says, break up the fallow ground. It's time to seek the Lord.

It's time to hunger and thirst. Gluttony for God's word is an evidence of hunger and thirst for righteousness. Because God's word is a righteous word.

And to know His ways and to know His will and to know Him is an evidence of being hungry and thirsty for righteousness. Amos talked about a time where there would be a famine in the land for hearing the words of the Lord. Amos 8.11-13 But in Psalms 119 and Psalm 19 and a number of other places, we see the hunger for the word of God on the part of those who hunger for righteousness.

Also, in order to see righteousness, we will persist in our pursuit of it. If a person pursues righteousness for a while and then gives up because it's too hard, they don't hunger and thirst. When you're really dying for food and water, you don't give up the search just because it gets hard.

You continue until you find it. And if you don't hunger and thirst for righteousness in a similar manner, many will not find it. Some people find something early in life.

And then because there are too many challenges, too many distractions, too many temptations, they don't pursue after righteousness continuously. And when they die, it's not there anymore. And I've known too many people like that, too sadly.

I can think of times in my life where if I had died at that time, I would have been one of them. But those who pursue because they hunger and thirst, they persist in their pursuit of righteousness. They will be satisfied and forever.