

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



Because we lived in a parsonage right next to the church and on a major US highway, we had a patch of lawn maybe 15 by 30 feet for our seven children to play on. They rode their bikes on the asphalt church parking lots. We couldn't grill in our back yard because so many people would drop by to talk. We needed a quiet place away from the public for the children to relax and play, so we bought a old, depleted farm in south Greenville county, near the Laurens county line.

It was such a wonderful place, a beautiful stream to wade in, horses to ride, a child's paradise. We put a small mobile home on it. We often went down on a Friday night and spent the day Saturday enjoying ourselves. Walt's idea of a relaxing day was, "Let's go down to the farm and ride the tractor!"

One Saturday while we were eating our picnic lunch down by the stream, a dog came hesitantly out of the woods. Our oldest son John went over to pet it. Then he realized that the dog was pitifully weak, almost unable to stand up. Its belly was swollen, but his bones were sharp under his skin. "Mother," he said, "this dog is starving. We've got to do something."

I carelessly said, "He must belong to one of the farmers around here. Kids, you mustn't feed him or he won't want to go back home."

“Mother, this dog will die if we leave him here.”

I looked, not at the dog, but into my son’s eyes. What I saw there had to be answered. “All right, John. He’s yours.”

“His name is Junior,” John announced.

The children all shared their sandwiches with Junior. He hungrily ate every scrap offered him, until not a crumb of food was left in the picnic hamper, and then he sniffed every empty paper plate for one more crumb, hungering for more. Junior went home with us, and became a beloved member of our family.

I think it was my first glimpse of a creature literally at the edge of death from starvation.

1. This beatitude tells us that if we hunger and thirst for righteousness we will be completely satisfied.

Our hearts are like that starving dog. St. Augustine said, “Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You.”

We instinctively yearn for a relationship with our Creator, and yet we sense our own lack of righteousness. When we were “poor in spirit” God brought us into His kingdom. But now we hunger for more. We want, not just forgiveness for our sins, but a face-to-face, heart-to-heart relationship with the One who created us to love Him. The closer we come into His presence, the more we hunger for His holiness.

God has “put eternity into our hearts,” as Ecclesiastes 3:11 says.

O 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.
So I have looked for You in the sanctuary,
To see Your power and Your glory.
Because Your lovingkindness is better than life,
My lips shall praise You. Psalm 63:1-3

Do you find in your heart an echo of David's longing, not just for forgiveness for sin, but the satisfaction of a personal relationship with your God? In this lesson we will discover how that longing can be fully and forever met.

2. Righteousness is more than simple forgiveness for our sins. It is a right relationship with God that meets the law of justice. Romans 8:4 describes it this way: “In order that the **righteous requirements of the law** might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.”

Who, according to Psalm 11:7, will see God's face?

How does Proverbs 20:7 describe a righteous man?

How does First John 3:7 define righteousness?

3. This righteousness must come from God, not from our keeping the law. It is ours solely by our trusting Jesus to forgive us. As we learned in the first lesson:

“For if by the trespass of the one man death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's **abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness** reign in life through the One man, Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:17).

How does Romans 1:17 emphasize this?

Galatians 3:11?

Genesis 15:6?

That Psalm so precious to us, Psalm 23, assures us, in verse three, that the Lord Jesus, the Good Shepherd, will “guide me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.”

4. But this righteousness does not mean we never sin. We will sin, but God in His mercy will discipline us so that we can be “trained” into righteousness.

How does Hebrews 12:11 explain this?

What does Proverbs 24:15,16 promise us when we fail in our walk with God?

5 It's hard for us to equate "holy" with "happy," as if holiness meant deprivation. But happiness is what this beatitude promises.

In the world we live in, it's easy to think that hunger can be satisfied with something less than God Himself! But we mustn't be misled by the advertisements, the articles in popular magazines on the "good life," the life-styles of the rich and famous. Virtual reality is not reality no matter how prettily presented in the movies. Sin only gives temporary satisfaction.

What does Ecclesiastes 5:10 warn us?

Why ought we not to be enamored of the things in this world? (1 John 2:15-17).

But what is God's gift to those who do His will? (1 John 2:15-17)

Second Corinthians 4:18 puts it this way, "For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

Jesus had a conversation with a Samaritan woman who came at noon to draw water from Jacob's well. The story is told in the Gospel of John chapter 4:7-26. He said to her (in verses:13,14) "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall

give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.’

6. We must seek for God's righteousness, hunger and thirst for it.

My precious mother, probably the most godly woman I've ever known, 94 years old, said, "I'll be so glad when I'm rid of this sinning body."

I will praise you with an upright heart
as I learn Your righteous laws.
Psalm 119:7

Isaiah 51:1 tells that we need to pursue righteousness and seek the Lord, and that we will find it in "the rock from which you were cut," that Rock being Jesus!

What does Matthew 6:33 tell us to seek first, before seeking other things we need?

Look at Romans 6:13. What are we not to offer our bodies to?

To whom are we to offer our bodies?

As instruments of what?

What does Second Timothy 2:22 tell us to run from?

And what, according to 2 Timothy 2:22, are we to pursue with a pure heart?

But we don't do this in a vacuum. What has God given us for "training us in righteousness? (2 Timothy 3:16)

What, in Second Timothy 4:8, is the relationship between the reward for righteousness and our longing for His coming again?

7. How can we "eat and drink" righteousness? It takes time and thoughtful attention. You need to get away from distractions, so you can "devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart," as Colossians 4:2 says. But actually, this longing for righteousness can be satisfied anytime, anywhere, whenever we turn to God in our hunger.

Susanna Wesley was the mother of nineteen children (eight of whom lived to maturity). Her husband was a distracted pastor, uninvolved in the rearing of the children. He left her for a year because he was displeased with her, and went to jail twice because he did not pay their bills. Susanna was responsible for the weaving of the cloth, the making of the garments, the feeding and training of all those children. But she appointed a time each day for one of the children to spend time with him individually. Their home was burned down twice. When her husband left town and left an incompetent preacher in his pulpit, she started an afternoon

service for her children in her home, using her husband's sermons and others. Soon 200 people were crowding in to hear her!

Her son, John Wesley, brought the kingdom of Great Britain to God. Another son, Charles Wesley, wrote many of the beautiful hymns we still sing today. How did she do it? She “ate and drank righteousness,” even in her lack of privacy. Sometimes she would take her apron and throw it over her head. Then, the children had learned, that meant Mother needed to spend time alone with God, so they were not to disturb her. So sometimes you may have to simply “throw your apron over your head” to get time alone with God.

King David himself did not always find this easy. He often had misgivings of heart. So when you doubt your own sincerity, or your lack of adequacy, read what he said to the Lord:

“As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O 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?" . . . Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance” (Psalm 42:1-5).

Read aloud this Scripture, using expression, as your first-grade teacher used to tell you, and make David's heart cry your own.

8. Then eat of this bread, drink of this infinitely

satisfying water of life. Nothing less will satisfy your hunger and thirst for righteousness.

What did Jesus promise those who asked Him to give them “this Bread always”? (John 6:32-35).

How did Jesus promise to fulfill our thirst for righteousness? (John 7:37-39).

Please read Isaiah 55:1-3, and discover:

What is the price we must pay for this holy satisfaction of our hunger and thirst?

What are we to listen to?

What will be our satisfaction?

9. A great reward awaits the righteous. What does God promise in Proverbs 18:10?

Isaiah 3:10?

Isaiah 32:17?

2 Corinthians 9:10?

James 5:16?

1 Peter 3:12?

And, best of all, Psalm 17:15?

"Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (Revelation 7:15-17).

I'm grateful that my sins are forgiven,
but I long for more.
I crave righteousness.
God is making me holy,
and He will completely satisfy my thirst.