

Beatitudes: *Blessed Are the Dissatisfied* - week 6

Rev. Scott McGinnis - First Presb. Church of Newton, KS - June 7, 2020
(Drawing from Rev. Darrell Johnson's *Beatitudes: Living in Sync with the Reign of God*)

We're continuing our series on the Beatitudes drawing from the book by Rev. Darrell Johnson, *The Beatitudes: Living in Sync with the Reign of God*.

Today we're considering the Beatitude in Matthew 5:6 **"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (that is right-relatedness), for they shall be satisfied."** Jesus came announcing what He called the gospel of God. Here it is again: **"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand"** (Mark 1:15).

It is time! It is time for the future to spill over into the present. It is time for heaven to come to earth! In Jesus, the kingdom of light is breaking into the kingdom of darkness! In Jesus, the kingdom of justice is breaking into the kingdom of oppression! In Jesus, the kingdom of life is invading and displacing the kingdom of death!

Are we surprised that Jesus follows the announcement of this good news with the call to **"turn around and put your weight on the gospel"**? What else can He say? *"It is time. God's new world order of love and grace and mercy have come near: Make a U-turn in the road and throw yourselves on me!"*

And when we do, something happens. A new kind of humanity begins to emerge, a new kind of humanity that Jesus is describing in the collection of saying we call “the Beatitudes.” **“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied”** (Matthew 5:6).

In this Beatitude, Jesus draws us into what will be the major theme of the rest of His Sermon on the Mount. He does not say, *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for religion, for they shall be satisfied.”* He’s come to tell us about a relationship that heals all our other relationships. Indeed, in this Beatitude, Jesus draws us into the major theme of what it means to be created human.

Let us first make sure we are hearing Jesus clearly. In this Beatitude, Jesus is not saying, *“Blessed are those who feel righteous.”* Jesus is not here saying, *“Blessed are those who are on their way to being righteous”* - although that is something He could say in certain contexts. Jesus is also not saying, *“Blessed are those who are declared righteous”* - although that is something He can say in light of His work on the cross. No, Jesus is here saying, **“Blessed are those who, although knowingly unrighteous, are hungry and thirsty for righteousness. They, and they alone, shall be filled.”**

As I have been suggesting so far in our series, the qualities Jesus congratulates in His Beatitudes are not natural human qualities. That is, we do not and cannot produce them. I cannot all of a sudden decide to become

poor in spirit, or gentle, or pure in heart; I cannot decide to hunger and thirst for righteousness. Rather, the qualities Jesus congratulates come into being by the life-giving power of His love - they emerge in us when Jesus and His gospel of the kingdom grab hold of us.

Jesus walks into our lives and calls us to follow Him. By His love and grace, He causes His kingdom, His reign, to break in... and something happens.

We become *lucky bums* who receive God's love without worrying that we need to be perfect first, we begin to mourn over the way the world is, and we begin to hunger and thirst for right-relatedness as never before. We begin to crave wholeness in our relationships.

In Jesus, we begin to taste God's new world order of mercy and love. We find He welcomes us home to know His Father and we begin to desire healing in our relationships. Under the reign of sin, we have had our natural longings distorted.

While we were originally created to naturally long for righteousness, sadly, sin entered the picture and we gave in to its power. Sadly, that natural human longing for right-relatedness got twisted and distorted. And in the mix, all other natural human longings also got twisted and distorted and became more dominant. Now more than righteousness, we crave food and drink, comfort and pleasure, wealth and fame. Need I illustrate?

In this Beatitude, Jesus is announcing good news. He comes into our lives, enters into all our hungers and thirsts, and restores in us the hunger and thirst for which we were made. In the process, He heals all the other natural cravings that the power of sin has twisted, some twisted into addictions. The Savior of the world causes His kingdom to break into our worlds, and He re-wires our distorted hungers and thirsts.

The hunger and thirst for righteousness does not displace the hunger and thirst for food or drink. How could it, given that we are physical creatures who need physical sustenance? However, the hunger and thirst for righteousness does heal the hunger and thirst for food and drink by delivering it from compulsiveness. The hunger and thirst for righteousness does not negate the hunger and thirst for sexual intimacy, but it heals that deep hunger and thirst by delivering us from obsession. The hunger and thirst for righteousness does not kill the hunger and thirst for greatness, but it delivers it from ego-centrality, and thus heals it. Jesus comes and reforms our appetites.

“Blessed (in sync) are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they and only they shall be satisfied.”

You may have noticed I’ve been interchanging the words righteousness and right-relatedness. Let me say something now about The Relational Nature of Righteousness.

There is no way we can exaggerate the place righteousness has in the Biblical Story - we encounter it everywhere in the Bible. In Genesis, in Exodus, in Deuteronomy (hugely), and in the Psalms:

“His righteousness endures forever” (Psalm 111:3; 112:3, 9).

“He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake” (Psalm 23:4).

“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne” (Psalm 50:6; 97:6).

“The heavens declare His righteousness” (Psalm 50:6; 97:6).

“Your righteousness is like the mountains of God” (Psalm 36:6).

We encounter it also in Proverbs, in the Prophets, and in the letters of the apostle Paul. Paul’s letter to the Romans is packed with righteousness. And it is everywhere in the teaching and preaching of Jesus.

The whole Sermon on the Mount is created around “righteousness”:

“Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees” (Matthew 5:20).

“Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them” (Matthew 6:1).

“Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness” (Matthew 6:33).

“Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness” (Matthew 5:10).

So what does “righteousness” mean? What are we dealing with here? Righteousness is all about living in faithfulness to the terms of relationship.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for right-relationship, for they and only they shall be satisfied.”

Many scholars argue that the theological center of the Sermon on the Mount, which the Beatitudes introduce, is Matthew 5:20, where Jesus says, **“For I say to you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.”** Yikes! Surpass? My righteousness must surpass the righteousness of the teachers of the Law and those who thought of themselves as spiritual giants?

Surpass? How in heaven’s name are those grabbed by the gospel to live a “surpassing righteousness”? By realizing that the scribes and the Pharisees had missed the point. They thought of righteousness in terms of external conformity to the letter of the Law and not at all about being faithful to the relationships being protected by the Law (5:21-48).

For Jesus, the righteousness of the kingdom goes beyond legality. Just because an action is legal does not make it righteous. **Righteous means being faithful to relationship**, which means dealing with others on more fundamental levels of honesty and justice and mercy and servanthood. It is to these more basic levels that Jesus calls us.

“Righteousness” is all about relational integrity and wholeness, a relational integrity and wholeness that encompass the totality of life. ***“Blessed are those who crave relational wholeness.”***

Now Scripture teaches us that we were created for four basic relationships, relationships that we were made for at the beginning of creation. These four relationships are most clearly laid before us in the opening chapters of the Bible, in Genesis 1-2.

First, we were made for a relationship with the earth (Genesis 2:7). We are physical, material, ecological creatures. The Hebrew word for human is *adam*; the Hebrew word for earth is *adamah*. Our welfare is tied up with the welfare of the earth.

Second, we were made for a relationship with other human beings (Genesis 2:18, 22). We are social creatures. None of us is whole in isolation; we were created for community. The Hebrew word for man is *ish*;

the Hebrew word for woman is *ishah*. We were made for fellowship with others.

Third, we were made for a relationship with the self (Genesis 2:25). We are psychological creatures. We were originally made to embrace ourselves as beloved without any guilt or shame.

And fourth, and most fundamentally, we were made for a loving relationship with our Heavenly Father, the Living God. This relationship holds all the other relationships together. We are spiritual creatures, designed for trusting, obeying, enjoying, loving, and experiencing God's own delight in being Father to us. We were made for a holistic relationship: A right-relatedness with the created world; A right-relatedness with other humans; A right-relatedness with our inner selves; And a right-relatedness with our Father.

And then we cannot read the Biblical Story without catching God's own hunger and thirst for this complete right-relatedness, because He loves us. We cannot read the whole biblical story without encountering the Father's grief. For the created order is now marked by so much unrighteousness: alienation, estrangement, manipulation, fear, hatred, violence, and death. This is all because we have turned our backs on the relationship with our Creator, which causes all the other relationships to unravel. But when we know, as Jesus tells us, we have a Heavenly

Father who loves us always, who welcomes us home, we can begin to restore these relationships.

“Blessed, blessed, blessed are those who, like God, hunger and thirst for a full-ordered righteousness.” For this right-relatedness.

Jesus here uses very intense verbs to describe this craving. William Barclay observes: *The hunger which this beatitude describes is...the hunger of the man who is starving for food; and the thirst of the man who will die unless he drinks.*

Jesus is not blessing those who are mildly dissatisfied with themselves and the world. He is blessing those who, as Dale Bruner puts it, *“Do not believe they can live unless they find righteousness.”* For all that is going on in our world, our cities, our country, we cannot live this way. We need our relationships restored. **“Blessed is the person who longs for righteousness as though his or her life depended on it.”**

Why this intensity? Why does this massive hunger and thirst for right-relatedness emerge in the souls of those grabbed by Jesus and His gospel?

Because the gospel is all about this! The kingdom of God that is breaking into the world in Jesus is all about right-relatedness. The gospel is the good news that the Righteous God, the God of all right-relationship, has not given up! The Creator’s intense passion that all of creation enjoy right-relatedness will not be denied. In

Jesus, God enters our unrighteous world and begins to reconstruct our four-fold relational existence.

The apostle Paul tells the believers living in Rome, “**I am not ashamed of the gospel**” (Romans 1:15). “Why?” “Because,” Paul answers, “**in the gospel the righteousness of God breaks through.**” The gospel of God is all about God “righteous-ing” all our unchecked relationships. In Jesus, God is repairing all our relationships: with God, with the self, with other humans, and with the earth. The resurrection of Jesus is God’s guarantee that God is going to see the job through to completion.

And that is why Jesus blesses those who are starving for righteousness: they are craving what the Living God craves. Congratulations! You are alive with the Divine appetite! You are alive in the Passion of God Himself to see this happen!

In sync are those who crave right-relationship with the earth. In sync are those who crave right-relationship with others, who seek reconciliation between individuals, groups, and nations as though their lives depend on it, who starve for authentic community where people relate beyond the masses, who starve for justice in law courts, integrity in business, and fidelity in marriage. “**They shall be satisfied,**” says Jesus. Only they shall be satisfied. No other satisfaction is promised.

When will they be satisfied? On that day when the kingdom of God breaks through all the way. On that day when the reconstruction job is finally completed.

But because Jesus has already come and is present by His Holy Spirit, because the kingdom is always near, our hunger and thirst can be met to a large degree even today, because every day Jesus offers us Himself.

Every day Jesus offers us Himself as the source and embodiment of all right-relatedness. He helps us gain this with others. As He said to a very thirsty woman by a well in Samaria, so He says to us: **“Ask of Me, and I will give you living water”** and we can share it with others (see John 4:10). As He said to those who had their fill of religion but were bone dry, so He says to us: **“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink... from his innermost being will flow rivers of living water”** (John 7:37-38).

As philosopher Peter Kreeft puts it: *“Dissatisfaction is the second best thing there is, because it dissolves the glue that entraps us to false satisfactions, and drives us to God, the only true satisfaction.”*

At the center of the universe is a relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit that we were not only created for, but we are invited into, and this relationship alone begins to satisfy the deepest longings of our heart. Out of this relationship, our other relationships can be enjoyed rightly in their right places without the need to use them for our

lack of God. Replace religion with right-relatedness and you get to experience the love and grace of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in your heart for you.

Do you see where we have come? It turns out that the hunger and thirst for righteousness is hunger and thirst for God, who is Righteousness Himself! Saint Augustine was right: *All our longings are, in the final analysis, longings for God.* So much so that Bruce Marshall can say that *“the young man who rings the bell at the brothel is unconsciously looking for God.”* He may not realize it, but his looking for a woman is symptomatic of his looking for God. **“Blessed are those who know they won’t be satisfied until they find God and rest in His love.”**

We were created for a relationship with the Living God. When we receive His love and grace, that relationship beings to hold all the other relationships together. This really speaks to the right relatedness that can be found and is needed in our world today.

“Blessed are those who are going to die unless they find God.”

Father God, we as You to meet us now, that we would hear of Your love for us. Minister to our hearts and souls that we would know Your goodness. Begin to put right all the relationships we have: with You, with ourselves, with each other, and with the created world. We need Your right-relatedness. Bless us with that. In Jesus Name, Amen.