

## The Sermon on the Mount: Lesson 4 Hungering and Thirsting After Righteousness

<sup>6</sup> Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.  
Matthew 5:6

### Introduction:

So far, these Beatitudes offer blessings to those who would otherwise not expect them. The spiritually destitute who have nothing to offer God; those who mourn over their sin; those who are meek; and now those who fall short of the righteousness God demands. Notice that we have seen a new King offer a new Kingdom, and He Himself is a different kind of King. This Beatitude steps into His new Kingdom with new desires!

Very few in this culture understand the hunger and thirst Jesus references in His sermon. Of those listening in person, the idea of starvation was a familiar one. Losing a day's wage could mean going hungry until the next day's wages were paid. Thirst in the desert was a matter of life and death, as fresh water sources were few and far between. The kind of hunger and thirst referenced here was not a hope for a mid-afternoon snack or a cup of coffee. It was a level of need that only God could provide.

Matthew uses the word "righteousness" throughout this sermon and his book seven times, in contrast with Luke's use once and John's twice in their Gospels. The other references in Matthew more fully define the Lord's use of the word in this Sermon. The study questions will address this deeper discussion.

For the grammar nerds among us, several authors noted that the Greek use of hunger and thirst would normally use a possessive case, which would lessen the amount of what was desired. Hunger would be satisfied with a piece of bread; thirst would be quenched with a little water. However, in this verse, hunger and thirst are connected to righteousness with a different case ending, the direct object. Rather than be satisfied with a little righteousness, these seekers wanted the whole amount or to be made complete in righteousness. They could not be satisfied with just a little righteousness.

Finally, note that it is not those who have attained righteousness who receive the blessing of God. It is those who recognize their inability to be righteous on their own. Like those who know the life-or-death matter of hunger and thirst, these seekers know the only one who can meet their need is God alone. The promise is that these are the only ones who will find what they know they so desperately need! God's Kingdom is full of people who desire His righteousness at work in their lives, which cannot be met by any earthly substitute. New longings define those who step into this new Kingdom.

### Study Questions:

1. Given Israel's long stretch since they had last heard from God (400 years between Malachi and John the Baptist's ministry), God's voice was a welcome refreshment to the drought they had experienced. Read Amos 8:11-12 and write what God had said that His people would hunger and thirst for.

2. Within those 400 years of God's silence, the religious leaders had expanded the Law to include hundreds of traditions as they tried to prevent Israel from moving away from God, as they had before Judah was destroyed by Babylon. The Pharisees practiced these traditions with careful attention. Matthew 23:23 mentions that they were even careful to tithe on the herbs they grew. Later in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus would teach that for those who follow Him, their righteousness had to exceed that of the Pharisees. (Matthew 5:20). It seems that Jesus is implying that more laws cannot satisfy God's demands. Write down your thoughts about why making more laws cannot make people right with God. (Read Matthew 23:23 to see what God wanted more than the careful keeping of laws and traditions.)
  
3. If God is not looking for perfect people (those who have already attained righteousness) to enter His Kingdom, then write in your own words who He does welcome.
  
4. In Matthew 5:21-47, Jesus uses the phrase, "You have heard it said...." five times, building on the words of the Law to show God's heart behind each one. In these five examples, Jesus explains how one's righteousness exceeds the outward conformity taught by the Pharisees. Jot down the subject of each of those five examples. Do they address outward actions or inward attitudes?
  
5. Matthew 5:48 summarizes God's righteousness, not as deeming oneself as good, nor being found good by fellow men, but as perfection found in God's own standard. What makes God's standard so much higher than human standards of goodness? Does anyone naturally fall into God's standards of holiness?
  
6. When considering God's standard for holiness: judgment, mercy, and faith (Matthew 23:23), it is easy to see that we all fall short of His glory. How does Matthew 5:6 give hope to all those who know they do not measure up? What is God's promise?
  
7. The promise from Matthew 5:6 precedes Jesus' promise later in the Sermon on the Mount in 6:33. The context of that verse is found in verses 24-34. How does the promise of seeking God and His righteousness first turn our usual desires upside down?

8. Before this study, would you have defined your desires as needing God's righteousness more than anything found on this earth? How does this study challenge you to prioritize God's standard of holiness in the future?
  
9. What practical changes can you put in place to prioritize God's righteousness above human standards of goodness?
  
10. Ultimately, where can you find completion and satisfaction? How does this give you hope when you fall short?