

**Foundations: The Fourth Blessing
Matthew 5:6 (AFBC 9/30/18)**

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”

Jesus talks about “those who hunger and thirst.” We all know how this works.

We take care of this at breakfast, but then it shows back up around lunchtime. We try to fix it then, but it comes back around at dinner.

For some of us, this usually returns just before bedtime, when, for some reason, the only thing that fits the bill is ice cream.

On a more serious note, do you hear Jesus saying that we should have this regular need, this hunger and thirst... for God, as well?

Jesus affirmed People in His day who were open to more of God—who hungered and thirsted for a right relationship with God; but He chastised those who believed they had plenty of God already.

Jesus said it is those who hunger and thirst who’ll be filled. Is this something we really want, though? Do any of us even need to be filled? We’re pretty full already, aren’t we?

1) Our houses are so full we can’t get the car in the garage. Too much stuff. The closets are full and the drawers are over-flowing. We have a solution, though: we give things away or store them in PODs—so that we’ll have room... for MORE stuff.

2) But then there’re our schedules—that are often more crowded than our houses. We hardly have time to breathe, we’re pulled in so many different directions. And we keep adding more stuff there too—LOTS to do. It’s crazy!

3) Our minds are full—or, at least, our eyes and ears are. We have something to look at and listen to all the time—TV and radio for the dinosaurs among us; all kinds of other devices for the younger crowd. Those other devices are neat, though, because you can use *them* even driving a car! Our brains are too full.

4) And dare we even mention our stomachs. We really don't miss many meals—when necessary, we'll also take care of that while driving.

We're gonna' eat—it may be junk food—but that keeps us well-rounded... In a whole lot of ways, friends, we're way past "full" already.

Maybe this makes it hard for us to hunger and thirst for anything else. When we're already so full, how can we possibly want more. The sad thing is, though, we DO still want more.

It's just that when we make our lists of what we find appetizing, "righteousness," the thing Jesus said we should hunger and thirst for most, gets left off the list. Our appetites are insatiable, but we're too busy or too full to have much of an appetite for God.

But when we do, Jesus promised: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." Let's unpack this beatitude and try to get at what Jesus is trying to teach us.

When you first hear it, which word gets your attention? It's probably the word, "righteousness." We don't hear that a lot today. It's almost a little embarrassing--righteousness.

When we do hear it, though, what do we think? Well, Jesus wants us to be good—which, in most people's minds, means what? Don't be bad!

Mom tells Billy, "Be a good boy," but all she's really wanting and hoping for is that Billy won't be a bad boy. So most of us carry that notion of goodness with us throughout life—and that may be the best we can come up with when it comes to "righteousness."

There was a revival going on down in the bayou. Bubba had been having some problems, so he decided he should go. The preacher invited anyone who needed to be prayed for to come forward during the invitation hymn. Bubba went down.

"Preacher," he said, "I need for you to pray for my hearing." So the preacher places his hands over Bubba's ears and prays. He prays long and hard. After a few minutes, he removes his hands, and asks, "Bubba, how's your hearing now?"

Bubba looks a little confused, and says: "I don't know, preacher. My hearing's not until next week in Baton Rouge."

Bubba hadn't been very righteous. But, you know, when it comes to the teachings of Jesus, maybe, like old Bubba, we have "hearing problems" too.

This is what we fail to hear. Jesus does not offer His blessing to those who *are* righteous, but to those who "hunger and thirst for righteousness." The other rabbis of that day would have taught, "Blessed are the righteous." Nothing new there.

But Jesus surprised everyone by saying, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." He who has ears to hear, let him hear—even Bubba needs to hear this—especially Bubba—but remember, when it comes to righteousness, we ALL look a lot like Bubba.

Here's the point. To be God's Kingdom people, we don't have to aspire to some lofty level of moral perfection. Good thing, for the Bible states very clearly that we couldn't reach that anyway.

We cannot achieve righteousness through our own efforts. What we *can* do is *desire it*, hunger and thirst for it. We hear the difference; but do we understand the difference?

It's hard for us to see hunger and thirst as a good thing. We hear about food and water shortages in other parts of the world.

We see pictures of emaciated children and people drinking water from a river in which others bathe and worse. Our hearts go out to these folks. We take an offering; or, if it's a local need, we collect clothing and canned goods to help.

Some people in our world understand what it means to be hungry and thirsty. But most of us find it easy to forget what these fundamental needs are like because we have no trouble with meeting these needs for ourselves and our families.

For Jesus' listeners, though, hunger and thirst were often painful realities. And Jesus spoke this beatitude only a short time after His time in the desert where He personally went without food for forty days.

Amazingly, Jesus still had the strength to tell Satan that "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." (Matthew 4:4)

Which must surely relate in some way to what Jesus is teaching us in the fourth beatitude. Just as we need food on a daily basis, we also need this relationship with God—not occasionally: say, a couple of Sundays a month--but daily, in every moment of life.

And Jesus wants us to recognize this need and give it a higher priority than even food for the body.

Remember the woman who pressed through the crowd in order to touch Jesus' garment, or the centurion who pursued Jesus because his servant was sick, or two different tax collectors, one praying in the temple and the other up in a tree—Jesus held them up as models for the rest of us. Not that they were better than us, they were just hungry and thirsty for what Jesus offered.

But we're told of others who *seemed* to want what Jesus had to give them, just not badly enough. They weren't so hungry or thirsty after all.

Think about the rich young man in Luke 18. He told Jesus he had obeyed God's law, played by the rules, done everything right. "So, what else do I need to do, Jesus?"

Jesus, in His wisdom and compassion, looked beyond the man's actions to his true appetites and said, "Sell all you have and give to the poor. Then come and follow me."

His heart went out to this fellow. He wanted him to have a better appetite for God. But the Bible says the young man went away, sorrowful. He just wasn't THAT hungry! Not THAT thirsty.

On one occasion, when large crowds were coming out to hear Jesus teach, he challenged them concerning whether they were really hungry enough to follow Him. Listen to what Jesus said:

"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:26-27)

Do we hear this? Jesus said we have to love Him more than we love family. We have to love Him more than life itself—because if we choose to *carry* a cross, we may have to *die* on it!

Some who kept on following Jesus in spite of that warning did indeed die as martyrs for the cause of Christ. Their hunger and thirst for God were real. So many others, though, lost their appetites and turned away.

Now let's go further. Jesus talks about hungering and thirsting for "righteousness." Let's take a closer look at that word. I've mentioned already how we struggle with it. We struggle with righteousness primarily because we don't understand it.

We still want to believe it's all about what we DO. We're driven to achieve, to measure up and prove ourselves worthy, so we mistakenly believe we can somehow achieve righteousness.

This was the problem Jesus had with the Pharisees and teachers of the law. They were convinced that they had arrived in their relationship with God. THEY were righteous!

In their minds, they were "good aplenty"—so good, they really didn't need any more of God. Instead, they took on the task of monitoring everybody else's lives and activities to make sure they were being righteous too.

What they called "righteousness," though, the New Testament calls "self-righteousness." That's a righteousness in one's own mind that's achieved by oneself for oneself by keeping rules that have been tailor-made for oneself.

But Jesus warned, **"... unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."** (Matt. 5:20)

Jesus wasn't impressed, even though that kind of righteousness is all about impressing others. Later in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said: **"Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven."** (Matthew 6:1)

So much for impressing anyone with our goodness. Remember, it's not the righteous, but those who hunger and thirst for righteousness that Jesus blesses.

I heard about a duck that went into a feed and seed store every day to ask, "Do you have any duck food?" Every day, the owner would say, "No, we don't sell duck food here."

Well, the owner finally got tired of this, so the next time the duck came in, he said, "For the last time, we don't sell duck food. And if you ask me again, I'll nail your foot to the floor!"

The next day arrived, and, sure enough, in waddles the duck. "Sir," said the duck, "Do you have any nails?" "No," said the owner. "In that case... do you have any duck food?"

The duck knew what he wanted! And you and I need to understand the nature of this righteousness, this spiritual nourishment, that Jesus wants us to desire. So this is the point we need to get—dare I say it—"nailed down."

When you hear the word "righteous," think "right relationship with God." You know this—you've heard it from me and others.

But along with that thought, your next thought should be that this 'right relationship with God' is completely beyond our abilities to achieve. Paul said to the church in Rome: **"There is no one righteous, not even one..." (Romans 3:10)**

Centuries before Paul said it, the prophet Isaiah had pointed this out when he wrote: **"All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags..." (Isaiah 64:6)**

It's not IN US to be righteous. But it is... IN GOD! He IS righteous—and loving and merciful and kind. And this gracious God chooses to DECLARE US righteous as you and I identify by faith with Christ Jesus, His Son.

Just listen as God's word speaks to us about righteousness: **II Corinthians 5:21—"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that IN HIM we might become (what?) the righteousness of God."**

Romans 3:20-22 explains this further: **"Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been**

made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe."

To hunger and thirst for righteousness, friends, is to hunger and thirst for a personal, life-changing relationship with the Lord. At the outset of His ministry, Jesus told us to hunger and thirst for this relationship, and that, if we would do so, we would be filled.

Then He said, **"I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty" (John 6:35).**

Later, He said, **"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him" (John 7:37-38).**

Good news! Christ's invitation still stands today. It goes out to you and me right now. Aren't you hungry for "the bread of life?"

Aren't you thirsty for "living water?" Aren't you tired of getting filled up with lots of things that just leave you feeling empty?

Come to Jesus. Hunger and thirst for His righteousness, and you WILL be filled. That's His promise—and He always keeps His promises.

Taste and see that the Lord is good. HE ALONE can satisfy the hungerings of your heart. He will quench that thirst for God that you have down deep in your soul.

Come to Jesus. Eat. Drink. And be filled.