

Sunday, October 18, 2020 | Kingdom Manifesto

Matthew 5:6 | Famished for Rightness

When it comes to food, our world has more than enough. Some would even say too much. For instance, worldwide obesity has nearly tripled since 1975.¹ It would seem we are living in an age where many are getting more than enough food to survive. But with this abundance, comes an unhappy consequence. As we all know, obesity kills. Here's a direct quote from the CDC, "Obesity is associated with the leading causes of death in the United States and worldwide, including diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and some types of cancer."² Simply put, we have taken the richness of our society and abused it.

What's worse is that while we live in one of the heaviest countries in the world, there are still 821 million people living in a debilitating cycle of malnourishment.³ That means that one in nine people go to bed hungry every...night.⁴ But most concerning is that malnourishment is also the cause of nearly 45% of deaths among children under the age of five globally.⁵ So, even though we here in the West have enough food to spare, there are many who do not have enough just to get by.

A similar situation centers on clean water. My church in Georgia partnered with a mission organization in India that specialized, among other things, in installing wells. People in developing countries have to walk on average over three and half miles just to get clean water. And, amazingly, the Sanma Missions Organization can drill down and install a handpump well, giving an entire village clean drinking water, for \$950.⁶ This then opens a door for them to start bible study groups with the hopes of evangelizing the whole village.

¹ General Editors, "Obesity and Overweight", April 1st, 2020, *The World Health Organization*, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/obesity-and-overweight>, [accessed, October 17, 2020].

² General Editors, "Adult Obesity Causes & Consequences", September 17th, 2020, The Center for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/adult/causes.html>, [accessed, October 17, 2020].

³ General Editors, "The facts: What you need to know about global hunger", May 08th, 2020, *The Mercy Corps*, <https://www.mercycorps.org/blog/quick-facts-global-hunger>, [accessed, October 17, 2020].

⁴ General Editors, "Global hunger continues to rise, new UN report says", September 11th, 2018, *The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations*, <http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/1152031/icode/>, [accessed, October 17, 2020].

⁵ General Editors, "2018 Global Nutrition Report reveals malnutrition is unacceptably high and affects every country in the world, but there is also an unprecedented opportunity to end it.", November 28, 2018, UNICEF, <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/2018-global-nutrition-report-reveals-malnutrition-unacceptably-high-and-affects>, [accessed, October 17, 2020].

⁶ <https://sanma.org/get-involved/projects/fresh-water/>

So, why am bringing this up? Because today we'll be talking about being hungry and thirsty. And I want you to understand that when Jesus used these terms, he was speaking to a group of people who knew what true hunger and true thirst was. They had lived through drought and famine. They understood the pangs of an empty stomach and the dryness of a dehydrated tongue. The average American does not.

So, as we walk through this fourth beatitude today, I want you to try and put yourselves in the shoes of a woman who's had to walk nearly four miles, three times a day, every day for her entire life, just to get clean drinking water. When we speak about being hungry, I want you think of the countless children in nations throughout our world who are more likely going to bed with a stomach that is grumbling with hunger than one that his full and contented.

But before we get there, we first have to read all the beatitudes. It's time memorize.

READ: Matthew 5:1-12 (NKJV)

¹ And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. ² Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:

³ "Blessed *are* the poor in spirit,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ Blessed *are* those who mourn,
For they shall be comforted.

⁵ Blessed *are* the meek,
For they shall inherit the earth.

⁶ Blessed *are* those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
For they shall be filled.

⁷ Blessed *are* the merciful,
For they shall obtain mercy.

⁸ Blessed *are* the pure in heart,
For they shall see God.

⁹ Blessed *are* the peacemakers,
For they shall be called sons of God.

¹⁰ Blessed *are* those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. ¹² Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great *is* your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Jesus says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.”

This is now week four of this series. So, as you know, before I can tell you what Jesus said, I have to first tell you what He didn't say. Jesus is not talking about *imputed* righteousness but *practical* righteousness.⁷

What's the difference?

Imputed righteousness is virtue that is given to another person. This is what occurs the moment someone confesses their sin and believes in the name of Jesus for salvation. At that moment, the Christian is credited with Christ's goodness and so becomes absolved from sin's penalty.

Interestingly, throughout Paul's writings, he usually hits on this principle at some point along the way. Most famously he speaks about this in his second letter to Corinth and his first letter to Philippi.

READ: 2 Corinthians 5:21 (NKJV)

For He [God] made Him [Jesus] who knew no sin to *be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

READ: Philippians 3:7-9 (NKJV)

⁷ But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. ⁸ Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which *is* from the law, but that which *is* through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith

What was Paul saying? He was saying that salvation is not simply the *negation* of our sin debt but it is also the *ascription* of divine righteousness to us. Meaning, salvation established a new legal standing with God for us. We, who were once sinful and separate from God, are now forgiven and reconciled to Him through Jesus Christ. Simply stated, imputed righteousness is a lawful declaration of a change from one state to another (e.g. marriage).

⁷ Carson, D.A., *Matthew*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew and Mark, Volume 9, Revised Edition, General Editors Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, (Grand Rapids; Zondervan Academic, 2010), p. 164.

Practical righteousness is virtue that is done for another person. Practical righteousness refers to the kinds of actions that embody justice. Meaning, practical righteousness refers to good actions done for no other reason than that they are good to do.

We know that it is this kind of righteousness that Jesus is referring to here in our passage and not imputed righteousness because this practical righteousness was the only sense in which Matthew used this term (cf. Mat. 1:19; 3:15; 5:20, 45; 6:1, 33).⁸ In fact, every time the Greek word Matthew uses here for righteousness is used in the LXX it is translated as either “deliverance”, “salvation”, or “victory” which is specifically addressing God putting right something that is wrong.⁹ It refers to justice and impartial judicial decrees in which rightness is upheld. In this way, another way of thinking about practical righteousness is to think of it as “functional godliness.”¹⁰ This is where principles of truth wins out over the nefarious schemes of falsehood.

Those who are godly will also function as if they are godly. And this kind of righteousness is found throughout the scriptures.

READ: Isaiah 1:16-20 (NKJV)

¹⁶ “Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, ¹⁷ learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow.

¹⁸ “Come now, and let us reason together,” says the Lord, “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool. ¹⁹ If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; ²⁰ but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword”; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

READ: James 1:21-27 (NKJV)

²¹ Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his

⁸ Turner, David L., *Matthew*, The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids; Baker Academic, 2008), p. 151.

⁹ France, R.T., *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 2007), p. 167.

¹⁰ Turner (2008), p. 183.

natural face in a mirror; ²⁴ for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. ²⁵ But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues *in it*, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

²⁶ If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion *is* useless. ²⁷ Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, *and* to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

While I know this term is fraught with a wide array of implications, this kind of “functional godliness” is akin to our modern term of “social justice.”¹¹ But the way we understand social justice today is also only half of what Jesus, Isaiah, James, and all of Scripture are advocating here when they're speaking about practical righteousness. We must not only “visit orphans and widows” but we must also “keep oneself unspotted from the world.”

It is not either or, but both. I'm not advocating for *social* justice. I'm advocating for *biblical* justice.

Without a doubt, our actions are first and foremost *our* responsibility. Just because we are dealt a short hand in this life does not give us a free pass to break the law. A bad situation does not excuse us from making good decisions. Anarchy, unrest, and destruction in the streets ought to distress us and the Christian ought never to be a part of such things.

However, when we see those less fortunate than ourselves, we have a responsibility—a divine directive—to act and speak up on their behalf. Here me. It's not enough to simply virtue signal about the injustices of our world. We must actively oppose them and try to right any wrongs we see. For instance, should we ever see an officer abusing their authority or using undo force and violence we ought to be one of the first to speak up and call foul. We must vote for officials and representatives who will protect and help those less fortunate than ourselves. We must be eager to live up to the requirements that God has set.¹² And we ought not be motivated by a desire to be on the right side of *history*.

¹¹ Morris, Leon, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 1992), p 99.

¹² France (2007), p 167.

Rather, we ought to yearn to be on the right side of *heaven*. Although, given enough time, those two are more likely to coincide than not.

In fact, we will not only be judged in the end-times by whether or not we put our faith in Jesus. We will also be judge on whether or not we acting in faith on behalf of Jesus for others.

READ: Matthew 25:31-46 (NKJV)

³¹ “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. ³² All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides *his* sheep from the goats. ³³ And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. ³⁴ Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: ³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; ³⁶ I *was* naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’

³⁷ “Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed *You*, or thirsty and give *You* drink? ³⁸ When did we see You a stranger and take *You* in, or naked and clothe *You*? ³⁹ Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ ⁴⁰ And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did *it* to one of the least of these My brethren, you did *it* to Me.’

⁴¹ “Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: ⁴² for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.’

⁴⁴ “Then they also will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?’ ⁴⁵ Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do *it* to one of the least of these, you did not do *it* to Me.’ ⁴⁶ And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

The famed Mr. Rogers said, “We live in a world in which we need to share responsibility. It’s easy to say ‘It’s not my child, not my community, not my world, not my problem.’ Then there are those who see the need and respond. I consider those people my heroes.”

When Jesus is talking about hungering and thirsting for righteousness he's talking about an insatiable desire for an upright lifestyle both from within and without. He speaking about those who not only yearn for righteousness in their personal lives but who also try to bring about that righteousness in our world. Such individuals are the heroes Mr. Rogers is talking about. They are the ones who Jesus says are truly blessed. Remember, the beatitudes are not "how to"s but "now that"s. They teach us what our priorities ought to be now that we are a part of the Kingdom. This is how we are to act. With this fourth beatitude, Jesus is saying that now that you have my imputed righteousness you are to then crave for righteous acts and so act accordingly (cf. Mat. 5:20).

And we aren't simply to yearn for it but we are to hunger and thirst for it. Jesus uses the metaphor of someone who is famished to explain the level of desire we are to have when going after that kind of practical righteousness. This is an intense longing for justice to have her way.¹³ Again, think back to the introduction with those statistics about those who are malnourished and lack clean drinking water. We ought to hunger and thirst for this righteousness as if we were in a developing country who lacked both. This is the kind of desire that is found throughout the Psalms.

READ: Psalm 42:1-2 (NKJV)

¹ As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. ² My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

READ: Psalm 63:1-5 (NKJV)

¹ 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. ² So I have looked for You in the sanctuary, to see Your power and Your glory.

³ Because Your lovingkindness *is* better than life, my lips shall praise You. ⁴ Thus I will bless You while I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name. ⁵ My soul shall be **satisfied** as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth shall praise *You* with joyful lips.

So, what's the takeaway?

We are to be famished for rightness. Meaning, it is only to those who care—that is, those who have a deep hungering and are thirsty to the point of dehydration—about the injustice they see both in the world and in themselves who are the blessed of God. And not just blessed, but filled. The famished are filled when they yearn for the rightness of God. In fact, the term Jesus

¹³ Morris (1992), p 99.

uses here is a rather graphic word referring to a fattening of an animal. Today, we'd say being stuffed as if we'd downed an entire thanksgiving meal alone.¹⁴

This is the kind of hunger that Paul is referring to when he says,

READ: Romans 8:18-25 (NKJV)

¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us. ¹⁹ For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected *it* in hope; ²¹ because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. ²³ Not only *that*, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. ²⁴ For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for *it* with perseverance.

So, what's the takeaway?

We are to be famished for rightness.

We are sojourners in a dry and thirst land. We are destitute of any righteousness within us and we are famished for any rightness within our lands. But praise be to God who will fill our hearts and renew our lands.

However, until God makes our world anew, this rightness will never be accomplished in this world as it is.¹⁵ But we ought not be distraught or discouraged by this. For though God's justice may seem to tarry, it will eventually come. And when it does, may we be on the right side of heaven and not necessarily on the right side of history. May we look to Jesus at the end and ask, "Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed *You*, or thirsty and give *You* drink? When did we see You a stranger and take *You* in, or naked and clothe *You*? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to *You*?" And then, may the King of kings reply, "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did *it* to one of the least of these *My* brethren, you did *it* to Me."

¹⁴ France (2007), p. 168.

¹⁵ Morris (1992), p. 99.