

A PASSION FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled."
Matthew 5:6.

Many who listened to Christ's matchless Sermon on the Mount must have been surprised and amazed at the language which He used, for He began His message by announcing the blessedness or happiness of the poor, the sorrowful, the meek, the hungry, the persecuted and the reviled. These conditions were not what men were accustomed to count as part of blessedness. Nevertheless, what Christ said then, as always, was true--true for the people of His day and those of our day.

In the first three Beatitudes we are called upon to witness the heart exercises of one who has been awakened by the Holy Spirit and saved by the Lord Jesus Christ. First, there is a sense of need. Second, there is a consciousness of guilt and a sorrow over a lost condition. Third, there is an end of seeking to justify self before God, or an abandonment of all pretense of personal merit. Fourth, the soul is turned away from self to Christ in longing for that which is sorely needed. Every sinner is destitute of righteousness, for "there is none righteous, no not one." Therefore, God has provided in Christ a perfect righteousness. This righteousness, which was wrought out by Christ, is placed to the account of the sinner who believes on Christ as Saviour.

This verse, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled," conveys a greatly needed message in these days of restless disappointment when so many are seeking that which does not satisfy. Perhaps it will help us to recall that those to whom Christ first addressed our text were eagerly desiring and seeking what they supposed were the blessings of the Messiah's kingdom--deliverance from a foreign yoke, wealth, dignity, honor and dominion. Those who were cherishing those desires were merely dreaming. They were soon to awake to disappointment, because the Messiah had not come with any intention of bestowing such blessings.

Blessed is the tree, the animal, or the human that knows the pang of hunger and thirst. Living things hunger and thirst. Hunger and thirst are an evidence of normal, vigorous and healthful life. If you do not hunger and thirst something is wrong with you. Loss of appetite is the red flag that nature hangs out to tell us that there is danger ahead. Lack of appetite is considered a bad indication; whereas, a good appetite is a pathway to growth and a source of genuine enjoyment. It is a delight to eat when one is genuinely hungry.

Hunger and thirst are the strongest desires of our physical nature. Not only are they the strongest desires, but they are the most familiar ones. All of us know their force and significance. Even a small child, who cannot speak the words "hunger" and "thirst," knows the desire for food and drink. These desires remain to the end of life.

Few, if any, of us know from personal experience the ravenous longing of a starving man or the agony of a parched throat, but all of us realize that hunger and thirst are the master appetites of human nature. Until they are satisfied a man has little thought to spare for other things. If a man is hungry, he knows that he is in need, and nothing will satisfy him except food. If a man is thirsty, he knows that his throat is parched, and nothing will satisfy him but drink. If a person is hungry or thirsty, he is neither comfortable nor contented. He is alertly looking for food or drink. He is neither finicky nor fussy. He is not concerned about the service but the food. He does not complain about the plate on which his food is placed, or about the cup from which he drinks, because the cells of his body are crying out with an intolerable craving.

There are no desires more intense than genuine hunger and thirst. The mild forms in which they come to us are but a shadow of the real thing. Both hunger and thirst are outreaching

instincts; they look to the environment for their satisfaction. Hunger within, food without—that is the law. No man can satisfy his own hunger or thirst; he must go forth and seek the bread and the water which he craves.

Nature's first, most constant, and universal signals of necessity are conveyed in the words "hunger and thirst." "Hunger" alone is expressive. "Thirst" alone is expressive. "Hunger and thirst" combined are more expressive, picturing a great longing and a strong yearning. The combination of these two words is a natural and strong expression for desire or craving, which is common in all languages.

The measure and quality of a life is determined very largely by the range and vigor of its wants. A mediocre line of wants means a meager personality. A higher standard of wants means an enriched personality. We should know whence our wants come, what lies back of them, what prompts them, and where they are likely to lead us.

Somebody has said that life's chief hungers are the strife for bread, the search for truth, the longing for beauty, and the desire to live nobly. Be that as it may, all are hungering and thirsting for something. All have their desires, their longings, and their ambitions. Our world is full of unsatisfied people. Multitudes are hungering and thirsting for wealth. Their minds are on this world. Their hearts are going out after this world. This race for riches is perhaps the most striking feature of present-day society. Men put vast energy and great enthusiasm into the pursuit of wealth, but it is not upon such that Christ pronounces the blessing of this text.

Think of the intellectual phase of the law of hunger. Many have hungry minds. Intellectual hunger is the preventive of mental decay. If the mind feeds upon nothing, it is bound to become like that which it assimilates. The true purpose of education is both to distribute knowledge and to create an appetite for it. Blessed is the person who longs to know. This very yearning is the secret of our intellectual progress. How much we owe to the people who have possessed an insatiable hunger for knowledge! Are you content with your intellectual attainments? What is your chief topic of conversation—ideas, events or people? Great minds discuss ideas; average minds discuss events; small minds discuss people.

Millions hunger and thirst after pleasure. With them self-gratification is the chief business of life. Those who spend their days in the pursuit of pleasure are always after some new sensation. Vast multitudes put boundless zeal and immense enthusiasm into the pursuit of pleasure, but it is not upon such devotees that Christ pronounces His blessing.

There are so many who hunger and thirst for honor and fame. Those who are trying to climb the ladder of ambition are unhappy, in spite of the fact that they are hungering and thirsting for what they imagine would satisfy their inward unrest. Even though they are willing to lay down their lives if only they may win for themselves a niche in the temple of fame, it is not upon those who are so anxious for glory that Christ's blessing is pronounced.

There is no guarantee of satisfaction for the lower wants of our natures. Men strive incessantly after all sorts of things; the world is a hive of strenuous endeavor after wealth, knowledge, pleasure, honor, fame and power. Many are wanting the world and the things of the world, but they are not satisfied when they get what they want. What a sad spectacle they present in their restless, unhappy search for satisfaction! When they try the world's doings, they are sorely disappointed. They carry the signals of inward unrest on their very faces. The streets are filled with people who show the flag of distress in the strain upon their faces. They are seeking happiness, but are trying in vain to make it. Satisfaction can never come from this world. It can never be made by man, nor won by works. It can come from God only. It is given by Him to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. To all who are hungering and thirsting for the things that can never satisfy, our Lord appeals to change the direction of their desires and to aim higher. He said, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled."

Many so persistently cultivate an appetite for the second best, or even for the worst, that they allow their higher hungers to become dormant and, for all practical purposes, utterly dead. Think of the vast number who frankly have no taste for the spiritual. The most spiritual and inspiring service ever held would scarcely awaken their interest. The best and greatest sermon ever preached would bore them. The very thought of worship is repellent to them. The Bible, which throbs with "thoughts that breathe and words that burn," is to them the driest and deadest of all books. The great Christian hymns, that for centuries have thrilled the hungry hearts of devout men and women and have served as stairways by which they have climbed into the presence of God, leave them dull, listless and uninterested. The man who has lost all appetite for his daily bread is to be pitied, but how infinitely greater is the tragedy when people lose all desire for the Bread of Life! One may lose his spiritual appetite for a while by seeking satisfaction on low levels, as a child may spoil his appetite for dinner by eating too much candy. What a tragedy when one's spiritual appetite is gone! God has not made any provision for the permanent peace, poise and satisfaction of the soul through the secondary and lower things of life.

Righteousness is not the state of being in good standing with one's fellow men, but it does involve the proper relationship with God. It implies Christlikeness. It includes being and doing what is right. The soul beholds righteousness, sees in it the reflection of God, and has a burning desire for likeness to Him. The one possession we should desire supremely and seek most earnestly is that of a Christlike character. Seek first, as the chief object of your striving, to be right in your relationship with God and with others. Make righteousness the supreme aim of your life as a Christian.

To say that one hungers and thirsts after righteousness implies that he is convinced that he lacks it, and yet cannot be happy without it. It is a longing to see the whole of life brought under God's rule—our homes, our friendships, our dealings with others, etc. Hunger and thirst after righteousness constitute a divine discontent with everything that is displeasing to God. In the light of the deep sense of need, nothing could better express an ardent desire after righteousness than hunger and thirst. Those who actually hunger and thirst after righteousness are comparatively few. Those who are referred to here are not the people who have fits of piety, or occasional desires to be righteous, but the ones who daily yearn, pray and strive for it.

In talking with a friend one day Abraham Lincoln said, "I have been reading the Beatitudes and can at least claim one of the blessings therein unfolded. It is the blessing pronounced upon those who hunger and thirst after righteousness." To be in want spiritually is a sure sign of spiritual health. Augustine, who had run the gamut of the world's proposals to satisfy human hungers, discovered that there was only one basic satisfaction, and that was God. In his Confessions he wrote, "Our souls were made for Thee, O God, and they are restless until they rest in Thee." Alfred Lord Tennyson was constantly conscious of the pull of the eternal. As an old man, standing in the very presence of the future life, he wrote his beautiful poem, Crossing The Bar, praying that "when that which drew from out the boundless deep turns again home," he might have the supreme satisfaction of seeing his Pilot face to face.

God does not mock us. He never implanted a desire in a human soul without at the same time providing for its fulfillment. Spiritual longings are but prophecies of fulfillments. They tell us of the possibilities of attainment that lie before. The quest after righteousness is one that never fails. The man who makes righteousness the supreme goal of his life is happy. There is unspeakable satisfaction and perfect peace in a life of this type. If you want to find the truly blessed and happy people, you must look for them among those who are hungering and thirsting after righteousness, among those who are pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

What is the promise to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness? "They shall be filled." "Filled" is a very strong and graphic word, originally applied to the feeding and fattening of animals. It was also used of the multitudes who were fed with the loaves and fishes. It is manifestly appropriate here as expressing the complete satisfaction of spiritual hunger and thirst.

The fulness of God is infinite. God is a fountain. If we bring the vessels of our desire to this fountain, God will fill them. However, we must be emptied of self in order to be filled with God.

On the farm we fattened hogs by giving them all the corn they wanted to eat. We kept corn on the ground, where the hogs fed, all the time. That enabled them to be full and fully satisfied. Even so shall those who yearn after righteousness, who long to be righteous and to do good, be "fed full, and completely satisfied." Giving does not impoverish God. He has a constant supply for all souls who hunger and thirst after righteousness. Christians who have a passion for righteousness are blessed now with a present filling. The longing to be like Christ and to do His blessed will brings a partial filling here, a progressive satisfaction that is sweet to the soul. But the future tense of our text, "shall be filled," reaches beyond the present to the future perfection of filling hereafter. The unspeakable satisfaction which begins here will be perfected yonder. The righteousness longed for and striven after on earth will be realized in heaven, that wonderful place of fruition and realization. May God send this blessed and burning passion for righteousness into our souls today! May He fill our hearts with a yearning for righteousness, purity and Christ-likeness, such as we have never had!