



Tim Pauley
PO Box 58403, Charleston, WV 25358
304.767.8430
tim.pauley@capitolcom.org

Hungering for Righteousness in the Capitol (The Sermon on the Mount) Matthew 5:1-12

William C. Marland must have one of the most interesting stories in West Virginia politics. After serving as a Navy lieutenant in the Pacific in WWII, he became Attorney General and in 1952 became West Virginia's 24th governor. Governor Marland struggled with alcohol, even being accused by political opponents of inappropriately drinking during the day. He left office to run for a special Senate election and lost. His political career over, struggling with his alcoholism, he left public life and eventually moved to the Chicago area determined to overcome his drinking problem. He gave up his drinking and found a job as a taxi driver in downtown Chicago. A reporter recognized him and wrote a story about the former governor now driving a cab. Before the story broke, he held a press conference to speak candidly about his life. He shared his reason for driving a taxi was to hold in check his ambition that may have help lead to his drinking.

Governor Marland reached the pinnacle of West Virginia politics. Yet it seems he was not truly happy or content. After a great struggle, he seemed to find greater happiness and satisfaction in life as a taxi driver than as Governor of West Virginia. As Jesus continues proclaiming the qualities found in those who follow Him, He proclaims that it is those who desire His righteousness who will find true happiness, contentment, and satisfaction in life.

As Jesus continues to share the Beatitudes – the attitudes and qualities of those who follow Him, He proclaims:

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”

Matthew 5:6

What Does It Mean to Hunger and Thirst?

Hungering and thirsting are often used in Scripture to describe our desire for God and His Word.

As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God. Psalm 42:1

I opened my mouth wide and panted, for I longed for Your commandments. Psalm 119:131

...Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord. 1 Peter 2:2-3

Jesus taught elsewhere on how He alone was the one who could satisfy our hunger and quench our thirst. In two of Jesus' "I Am" statements in the Gospel of John He proclaimed He was the "Bread of Life" and the "Living Water"

...Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life." John 4:14

“I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst. John 6:35

"Hunger" and "thirst" speak of a tremendously strong desire for that which is necessary for our very life and existence. If we lack physical food and water, our desire for those life sustaining substances outweigh our desire for anything else at the time. If we are truly poor in spirit we realize we lack the resources necessary for any spiritual life. When we mourn we realize our sinful state before a holy God. This brings us to an attitude of meekness before Him. Then we hunger and thirst, we strongly desire to be right with Him.

For What Should We Hunger and Thirst?

Jesus tells us we are to hunger and thirst for **righteousness**. He also makes it clear we must desire the right kind of righteousness. In perhaps the key verse of the entire Sermon on the Mount, Jesus proclaims **“...Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.”** (Matthew 5:20) The scribes' and Pharisees' righteousness was an external one of their own making, the keeping of laws, rules, and traditions.

So what is this righteousness of which Jesus is speaking? This term brings us to two of the key words and concepts found throughout Scripture; **righteousness** and **justification**. Both terms come from the same

Hebrew (Old Testament) and Greek (New Testament) words. The Hebrew root for the word is used over 500 times in the Old Testament. The Greek root for the word is used over 225 times in the New Testament. **“Righteous”** most simply means the character or quality of being right or just. It speaks of being right in a relationship with God. **“Justification”** is the act or process by which we are made right with God. There are two aspects of righteousness for which Jesus says we should hunger.

Salvation

When a person is poor in spirit, realizing their spiritual need and poverty before God; when a person mourns over their sin; when a person is meek and humble before God, that person will then hunger for that which can make him right with God. He will have a tremendous desire to find what will take care of his sin. God has provided the way for our sins to be forgiven and for us to have a right relationship with Him. This was done when Christ suffered and died for us and for our sin. When we place our faith in Him, not only are our sins forgiven, but Christ’s righteousness is then given to us. This is what the Bible calls **justification**.

Justification in the Bible sense is the act of God removing from the believing sinner, his guilt and the penalty incurred by that guilt, and bestowing a positive righteousness, Christ Jesus Himself.¹ It speaks of the action or process by which a person is brought into a right relationship with God.

Paul writes of this aspect of righteousness in Galatians 3:6, repeating it in Romans 4:3, both quoting Genesis 15:6: **“Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.”** He vividly wrote of his own hunger and thirst for this righteousness:

⁸ More than that, I count all things to be loss [in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, ⁹ and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith... Philippians 3:8-9

Not only does Jesus speak of the righteous we find through faith in Him, He also refers to another aspect of righteous for which we should hunger.

Sanctification

The desire for righteousness, the act of hungering and thirsting for it, refers to the desire to be free from sin in all its forms and in its every expression in our lives. Jesus is claiming that those who are Christians, who are members of His kingdom, will have a deep genuine desire not just to have a right relationship with God but to live lives that are holy and free from sin.

We find an expression of this beatitude in the Old Testament in Psalm 24:1-5

Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? And who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood and has not sworn deceitfully. He shall receive a blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

It is important to remember we do not earn our salvation by our works or our actions. We will have righteous actions because our hearts have been changed. We do not become members of God’s kingdom by striving to live out the Beatitudes or the Sermon on the Mount. We do those things because we are already members of God’s kingdom.

What Are the Rewards for Hungering and Thirsting for Righteousness?

When we desire righteousness, Jesus says we will be satisfied. When we desire beyond all else to be right with God, and we are willing to come to Him on His terms by placing our faith in Christ and His righteousness, then we will certainly find satisfaction in salvation through faith in Him. When we as believers desire beyond all else to be righteous in our thoughts, attitudes, and actions, and go to God’s Word and depend upon the Holy Spirit to help us change and grow, Jesus says we will be satisfied. We will experience growth as we become more like Christ and see the Beatitudes, the fruit of the Spirit, and other Christ-like qualities developed in our lives.

We realize this beatitude, along with rest, will only have its final and complete fulfillment when we reach the heavenly kingdom. We find salvation in Christ here and now, but our desire to have righteousness in our thoughts, attitudes, and actions will only be completely fulfilled at that time. Until then we realize our dependence upon God and His word to help us grow more like Him. We repent and confess our sins when we fail (1 John 1:9). The very ongoing struggle with sin in our daily lives should give us an even greater hunger for the righteousness we can find in Christ.

All this leads us to ask ourselves some vitally important questions.

What are we hungering and thirsting for in life?

Are we hungering to be right with God and find true satisfaction through faith in Christ?

Do we hunger to know God and His word and desire to be more like Christ?

CAPITOL BIBLE STUDIES

Thursdays

8:00 AM Government Org. Conference Room (East Wing)

12:00 PM Senate President’s Conference Room