

ST. ARMANDS KEY LUTHERAN CHURCH

SARASOTA, FLORIDA

STUDY NOTES FOR SAKLC CONVERSATIONS ON THE BEATITUDES OF JESUS

FEBRUARY 11, 2016

“THE BLESSEDNESS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS”

(Matthew 5:6)

[SEVERAL COMPARATIVE TRANSLATIONS]

(GREEK) μακάριοι οἱ πεινῶντες καὶ διψῶντες τὴν δικαιοσύνην, ὅτι αὐτοὶ χορτασθήσονται.

Makarioi hoi peinoNtes kai dissonτες tEn dikaiosunEn hoti autoi chortasthEsontai

Blessed (are) those hungering and thirsting for righteousness, for they will be filled.

(NRSV) - **“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”**

(GNT) - **“Happy are those whose greatest desire is to do what God requires; God will satisfy them fully!”**

(CE) - **“Happy are people who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness, because they will be fed until they are full.”**

(MSG) - **“You’re blessed when you’ve worked up a good appetite for God. He’s food and drink in the best meal you’ll ever eat.”**

(AMP) - **“Blessed [joyful, nourished by God’s goodness] are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness [those who actively seek right standing with God], for they will be [completely] satisfied.”**

SHARE GOD’S PEACE WITH OTHERS; THEN, SEEK SOME ANSWERS TO:

1. What do you see as similarities between spiritual hungering and thirsting, and the hungering and thirsting of modern-day consumerism? What are some of the differences?
2. In a world of overwhelming choice, how does being in a relationship with God limit your choices?

SOME INTRODUCTORY THOUGHTS:

The words used in this Beatitude do not occur in a vacuum; they are spoken against a background of human experience. As humans, we have differing physical appetites, but all of us have a common hunger for happiness. We spend most of our lives pursuing it; for many of us that hunger is never satisfied.

Based on our 21st-century life experiences, ***“hunger for righteousness”*** are not words that we would ordinarily speak. But, if you were sitting at the feet of Rabbi Jesus, you probably knew physical hunger and thirst all too well; you lived a hand-to-mouth existence; extreme thirst and starvation were ever-present possibilities; there is no adequate comparison in our modern experience to what actually existed when Jesus walked the earth. *“Give us this day our daily bread,”* was prayed with much greater feeling back in those days than it is in ours. So, ***“hunger and thirst”*** as used in the context of this Beatitude are expressive of the strongest and most intense desires which humans can possibly feel! The aforementioned notwithstanding, in this beatitude, Jesus turns the hierarchy of human needs on its head and, in effect, he says to the assembled crowds: ***“Forget your empty bellies and your parched throats: being ravenous for righteousness is really where it’s at!”***

Many of us think of ***“righteousness”*** as a legal term – something you do. It’s also a relational term – something you experience, such as being right with God and others; it is living in such a way that jibes with life as God created it, and knowing more of His reign and order because that’s where life is.

Did our founding fathers have this Beatitude in mind when they crafted the Declaration of Independence? That document asserts that citizens have the right *‘to the pursuit of happiness.’* Surely those founding fathers did not presume to guarantee that all who pursue it would find it, although some in today’s society believe it should be guaranteed as a universal government benefit, regardless of cost! Happiness is beyond the power of any government to provide. Each person, however, is free to seek whatever kind of happiness she/he wants in the way she/he wants, provided it is within the law. Sadly, many U.S. citizens, like most people throughout history, have chosen to pursue the wrong kind of happiness in ways that ultimately provide no happiness.

Scripture is rich in providing illustrations of those who falsely hungered and thirsted after something:

- a) **The Rich Fool** hungered for a life of ease – (Lk. 12:16-21) – ***“Then [Jesus] told them a parable: “The land of a rich man produced abundantly. ¹⁷ And he thought to himself, ‘What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?’ ¹⁸ Then he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ ²⁰ But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ ²¹ So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”***

- b) **King Nebuchadnezzar** hungered after the praise of men – (Dan. 4:29-30) – **“At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, ³⁰ and the king said, “Is this not magnificent Babylon, which I have built as a royal capital by my mighty power and for my glorious majesty?”**
- c) **Demas** hungered after *“this present world”* – (2 Tim. 4:10) – **“for Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica.”**

A) **DO WE HAVE TO BE REALLY HUNGRY TO BE HAPPY?** This beatitude is intended to lead a person to make **radical changes** in his/her life. In effect it is saying: **“I want life in a totally different way! I want it God’s way.”** These are people who recognize their limitations and realize that only Christ can redeem their situations. [several examples]

1. Pat Summerall, now deceased, a star athlete (*football*) and a legendary sports announcer, overcame alcoholism and became a follower of Christ when he was in his late 60’s. About prayer meetings and Bible studies he was publically quoted as saying: *“It’s like an alcoholic looking for a drink. If he wants it bad enough, he can find it – no matter what. I’m like that when it comes to finding AA meetings and Bible studies. No matter where I am working, I know that they’re out there and I can find them.”* (Sports Illustrated – 12/2001)
2. A millennial made this recent confession – *“My life consists of drinking, drugs and broken relationships, I need to change or die!”*
3. A couple who were being interviewed by “Dr. Phil” on T V were moved to say – *“Living together without the commitment to marriage just doesn’t seem right anymore.”*
4. To persons really hungry for a change, God provides these filling words: (Psalm 107:8-9) (NRSV)

**⁸ Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,
for his wonderful works to humankind.**

**⁹ For he satisfies the thirsty,
and the hungry he fills with good things.**

5. In the Magnificat, Mary sings these words of praise (Luke 1:53) – **“he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.”**
6. Summation: Might it be correct to say that in God’s sight: We have to be really hungry to be happy?

-QUESTIONS TO PONDER-

1. Are the verses quoted in Psalm 107 and Luke 1 talking about a literal or figurative hunger/thirst?
2. Why use the hunger and thirst metaphor in the Beatitudes?
3. What's the great assurance in all these verses?
4. Why do we need to be hungry and thirsty to be happy?
5. How can we cultivate that hunger and thirst?
6. What adds purpose or meaning to your life?

B) WHAT IS RIGHTEOUSNESS?

1. In the days of Jesus' ministry, "*righteousness*" among the Jews was measured by outward expressions and displays, not upon inner holiness.
 - a) The Jews obviously loved to put their righteousness on display:
 - Matthew 23:5 – "***They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long.***"
 - Cf. Deuteronomy 22:12 – "***You shall make tassels on the four corners of the cloak with which you cover yourself.***"
 - b) The Beatitudes are better understood if we recall the prevailing standards of righteousness in Jesus' day.
 - The religious life of the people had become primarily centered within the temple & synagogue.
 - It was measured in terms of attendance, contributions, and obedience to the myriad of rules, precepts, traditions and laws handed down and added to by generations of priests.
 - It was quite professional and 'cold,' but very dignified! Nobody enjoyed it; everybody did it. People kept the rules because they knew they were expected to, not because they really believed in them. (*Do you see any parallels to today?*)
 - Consider this quote: "*Their righteousness was like perfume – it wasn't a part of you but if you had it on, it made you smell real sweet. Of course, everybody recognized the odor, but that didn't matter, because they used it, too!*"

- c) The word translated “**RIGHTEOUSNESS**” (GREEK: δικαιοσύνη) is defined in most Lexicons as “**righteousness; what is right; justice; the act of doing what is in agreement with God’s standards; the state of being in proper relationship with God.**”
- d) The righteousness of which Jesus spoke is a positive virtue – it is an attribute motivated by love for God and a fervent desire to please Him.
- e) St. Paul declared that the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation because it reveals the righteousness of God. Romans 1:16-17 – ***“For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, “The one who is righteous will live by faith.”***
- f) But, the Jews had set up their own system of justification, and they were ignorant of the gospel plan or how God forgives sinners.
- g) Later, in the same epistle, St. Paul writes: Romans 10:3 – ***“For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they have not submitted to God’s righteousness.”*** The Jews were ignorant of God’s righteousness, and were busily going about seeking to establish their own righteousness; they had not submitted to the righteousness of God. But the Jews were not ignorant of God’s character; they knew that God is a righteous being. Therefore, the righteousness of God did not refer to an attribute of God, but rather to the righteousness to be imparted to humans by the forgiveness of God and necessary for justification of sinners.
- h) God does not urge humans to spirituality because it is their duty. God tells them that real happiness is obtained by hungering and thirsting after righteousness! And, God promises to satisfy that hunger!
- On this point consider Ezekiel 18:25-32 – ***“Yet you say, “The way of the Lord is unfair.” Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair? ²⁶ When the righteous turn away from their righteousness and commit iniquity, they shall die for it; for the iniquity that they have committed they shall die. ²⁷ Again, when the wicked turn away from the wickedness they have committed and do what is lawful and right, they shall save their life. ²⁸ Because they considered and turned away from all the transgressions that they had committed, they shall surely live; they shall not die. ²⁹ Yet the house of Israel says, “The way of the Lord is unfair.” O house of Israel, are my ways unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair? ³⁰ Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, all of you according to your ways, says the Lord GOD. Repent and turn from all your transgressions; otherwise iniquity will be your ruin. ³¹ Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have***

committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? ³²For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord God. Turn, then, and live."

-FOR FURTHER THOUGHT-

1. According to the words of Ezekiel, who is just and who is unjust?
2. How can a person move from unrighteousness to righteousness (vs. 30-32)?
3. What does it mean to repent?
4. How do these verses relate to a hunger that only God can satisfy?

- i) The *paradox* is that those who hunger and thirst continuously will be filled continuously. As you yearn for more of God's righteousness, God will bring it by His very presence and in such a way that you will find it deliciously satisfying.
- j) Ponder this thought seriously: Is it possible that you are being satisfied by another source? Is there a pursuit or person, activity or addiction, thing or thrill, hobby or habit, which is taking up space in your life that God wants to occupy?

C) THEY SHALL BE FILLED....

1. What shall those who have been hungering and thirsting after righteousness be filled with?
 - a) They shall be filled with righteousness!
 - b) They will receive that for which they have been striving!
2. **"Shall be filled"** (χορτασθήσονται) – a very strong and graphic word; it originally applied to the feeding and fattening of animals kept in a stall.
 - In the Synoptic Gospels (@Matt. 14:20; Mk. 8:8; Luke 9:17) it is used relating to Jesus' feeding of the multitudes with loaves and fishes.
 - In Revelation 9:17, it is used of the filling of the birds with the flesh of God's enemies: ***"And the rest were killed by the sword of the rider on the horse, the sword that came from his mouth; and all the birds were gorged with their flesh."***

3. As it is used here, the word expresses the complete satisfaction of one's spiritual hunger and thirst!
4. The person who is hungering and thirsting after righteousness knows that sin has separated him/her from God and longs to restore fellowship with the Father in heaven. See Isaiah 59:1-2 – ***“See, the LORD’s hand is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. ² Rather, your iniquities have been barriers between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.”***
5. In this Beatitude, Jesus is suggesting that one develop an absolutely ravenous hunger and thirst; as several apostles were subsequently moved to write: a good appetite is usually a mark of good health!
 - 1 Peter 2:2 – ***“Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation.”***
 - Hebrews 5:12-14 – ***“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic elements of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food; ¹³ for everyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is unskilled in the word of righteousness. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, for those whose faculties have been trained by practice to distinguish good from evil.”***

D) CONCLUSIONS:

1. This beatitude refers to the overwhelming desire for the justification that the Gospel of Christ offers to sinners. In order to receive that justification one must possess the inward qualification of desiring it – hungering and thirsting for it. It means that the Gospel is persuasive, not coercive in character. We cannot by the use of some *super medical-type needle* inject the Gospel into a human being – Christianity is not received that way! A person must know what the Gospel offers, realize his/her own condition without it, and desire with special craving what the Gospel will bring to her/his life. It simply defines who will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The blessing of righteousness is attached to conditions that we have the power to fulfill.
2. This beatitude speaks of a driving pursuit, a passionate force inside human beings. It has to do with ambition – ambition of the right sort – whose object is to honor, obey and glorify God by partaking of His righteousness. This holy ambition is in great contrast to the common ambitions of men and women to gratify their own lusts, accomplish their own goals, and satisfy their own egos.

3. The words of the Psalmist have special application here (Psalm 42:1-2) – ***“As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. ² My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?”***

4. God wants to help create that hunger in our hearts which will result in righteousness and ultimately in eternal life!
 - Romans 6:17-23 – ***“But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted, ¹⁸ and that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹ I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification. ²⁰ When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹ So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end of those things is death. ²² But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.***

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