

## Notes – Hungering for Righteousness

*'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled'*

*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" (The Message)*

### Hunger and Thirst

People of the time of Jesus knew what it was to hunger and thirst – the average working man in Palestine would eat meat once a week. Many lived close to the border between hunger and starvation. Water was an even more precious commodity (as it is in large parts of Africa today). When the Bible talks about hungering and thirsting, it is in the context of those who will starve if they don't eat, and die if they don't drink. It evokes memories of Psalm 63.1, 84.2, 1 Peter 2.2. It speaks of a passionate longing (Matthew 6.33, Timothy 6.11).

[It may be an idea to do something to make people hungry as an alternative learning experience – have food cooking and the smells coming in, eat and don't offer any, share funny stories about embarrassing stomach rumbles, or your mouth drying up you were so thirsty...]

The Christian who is hungering and thirsting after righteousness will not be satisfied by anything else.

God has put eternity in our hearts and we have an inconsolable longing that can only be filled by him yet we try to fill it with travel, achieving goals, sexual conquests, drugs, financial success etc, so the longing remains. We drink at broken cisterns (Jeremiah 2:13) and eat bread that doesn't satisfy, ignoring words of Psalm 107:9. CS Lewis words ring more true – *"If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probably explanation is that I was made for another world"*.

### Righteousness

Righteousness is a strange term today, we don't really know what it means yet we tend to shrink away from it, preferring to seek effective techniques, spiritual power, maturity, contentedness, and experience of God yet the thing Jesus calls us to hunger after to not be able to do without is righteousness. So what is it?

Righteousness and justice have the same root Hebrew and Greek words. Often we take righteousness to be associated with individual morality and justice to right social order. However the Hebrew usage tends to be relational – i.e. righteousness is worked out in relationships. The idea of righteousness as solely an inward virtue is not Biblical but comes from Greek philosophy. Matthew uses 'righteousness' more than the other gospel writers and tends to use it to refer to the ethical conduct of the followers of Jesus, although in 5.6 it could be translated 'justice' and in other places refers more to the righteousness given to us by God. John Stott has a helpful summary:

*"Righteousness has 3 aspects in the Bible - legal, moral and social.*

*Legal righteousness refers to a right relationship with God. The Jews pursued this by trying to follow the law but the only way we can be in right relationship with God is through faith in Jesus substitutionary death on the cross. As a result we stand 'righteous' in God's sight. But the beatitudes refer to those who belong to Jesus already.*

*Moral righteousness refers to our character and conduct – living in accordance with God's will and seeking to please him. This is not merely external like the Pharisees (Matt 5.20 but internal expressed externally– about the heart, mind and motives behind our actions)*

*Social righteousness is concerned with seeking liberation for the oppressed, promotion of civil rights, justice, integrity in business dealings and honour in home and family affairs – as demonstrated by the prophets in the OT. "*

The beatitudes are about reflecting the character and glory of God. Righteousness is a characteristic of God; therefore we are to reflect that. It can be summarised as – **a pattern of life in conformity with God's will**. The beatitudes are in two sets of four, each ending with a reference to righteousness. The previous three are descriptions of emptiness, not characteristics of overflowing fullness. Jesus pronounces a blessing on those who recognise their emptiness and hunger for the only thing which can satisfy that –righteousness. It is also not enough to mourn over sin (our own or in society), we must hunger for future righteousness, the person who does that is not drifting in a sea of religious triviality, or distracted by inconsequential trivia. They want to be righteous not because they simply fear God, but because righteousness is the most desirable thing in the world. The next three unpack this, the one who hungers for righteousness and is satisfied overflows with mercy to others, is pure in heart, and actively seeks to make peace with others. For this righteousness which flies in the face of self-centredness will be persecuted (See also John 3.19-20).

## Notes – Hungering for Righteousness

One of the key verses regarding righteousness in the remainder of the Sermon on the Mount is 6.33. Throughout this sermon Jesus talks about our righteousness exceeding that of the Pharisees, and stresses that righteousness is the combination of the internal and external. It is not just deeds, but deeds motivated by a hunger and thirst to see God's ways and God's will done. This righteousness goes to the extent of loving and forgiving our enemies – 'blessed are the merciful, the peacemakers'.

Deuteronomy 15 looks at the concept of jubilee, and how justice/righteousness was to be worked out in the OT covenant community (Ruth is probably the only example of this in operation). Amos 5 and Isaiah 58 are well known passages regarding righteousness in business dealings and lifestyle. The extremes of regarding righteousness as simply inner virtue, or external acts are both castigated in this combination of passages to give a rounded holistic view of the righteousness God desires in us, His people.

### They will be filled...

Being filled almost a paradox for it is a continual hungering and thirsting. Satisfaction increases the hunger – like a high jumper who with every successful leap asks for the bar to be set higher. Our hunger and thirst is only satisfied if we keep eating and drinking, and the more we eat and drink of God's goodness, of his ways, of living out his kingdom, of seeing his will done in our lives as it is in heaven, the more we desire more of it. As with all the beatitude promises, ultimately right will triumph, justice, righteousness and peace will be established when Jesus returns. We are also to long for this day, when evil doers will be held to account and we will not be disappointed.

Hunger is both a sign of life and health, if like the church in Laodicea we are apathetic; we are unhealthy, and lifeless. The promise will ultimately be fulfilled on Jesus' return, in the establishment of the new heaven and new earth, but while in-between we can never fully be satisfied, we strain towards the finish line and that future day. There are links to John 7.37-8, Jeremiah 29.13 with the Spirit providing the power to live this life of righteousness, that is not of our doing but of God at work in us, his character being reflected in us so that "people will see our deeds and praise our Father in Heaven"

But in a broken and fallen world surely the task is too big? CS Lewis said *"Despair is the greater sin than that which provokes it"*. The fact that despite our efforts we will never fully transform an evil and sinful society is no excuse for opting out. Martin Luther – *"if you cannot make the world completely pious, then do what you can"*. Edmund Burke – *"All that is needed for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing"*. We are called to be salt and light, to seek justice and bring the message of hope to them. We are called to love our neighbours – *"to love those we don't know is to seek justice for them"*. This begins with small things – how we deal with those around us, and extends to how we live justly and righteously in a global village. As we do all this we remember that it is not in our own strength but God's Spirit – the river of living water flowing from us.

Revelation 7.16 – tells us of God's people in their future state - never again will they hunger, never again will they thirst, so as with other beatitudes we gain satisfaction here but ultimate satisfaction is to come, on that day when "justice will roll down like a mighty river" and God's kingdom of righteousness, justice and peace comes in all its fullness.

John Piper's sermon on the beatitudes and this passage (you can read or listen to them) are helpful  
[www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByScripture/14/](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByScripture/14/)

**Don't let a discussion on what righteousness is or isn't take the sting out of the challenge as to how much we are hungering after righteousness.**

It is also important to help people begin to figure out how they need to 'practise righteousness'. That's why we have included the parts of finding one thing you could do as a group. This could involve the global end of the scheme –getting involved in campaigning (contact Jen – [socialaction@qubcu.com](mailto:socialaction@qubcu.com) for more info), or locally by doing SALT or blanketmania together those are just starter ideas. It is vital that we work out this stuff in our personal relationships – which is why we want to be specific and start to hold each other accountable. Obviously lots of this will be fleshed out further in the coming weeks.