

Blessed Are Those Who Hunger

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Introduction.

- A. A couple of months ago, Lauren and I had Ben and Katie Guyer, who normally worship with the Hammond congregation, over for pizza. As Ben and I were on our way to pick up the pizza, we got to talking about how his job was going. One of the workplace skirmishes that he constantly fights is that his employers continually ask him to work on Sunday, and he continually refuses. His co-workers just don't get that. They don't understand why he's willing to work any other time, but not then, why he is determined to be at services every Sunday, even though nobody is forcing him to be there. With their value set, they just don't get that.
- B. Ben's experience is far from unique. Just about all of us who have secular jobs have to deal with employers or co-workers who don't get us either. It's inconceivable to them that serving God has such importance in our lives. As far as they're concerned, anybody who makes the decisions that we do has to have a screw loose.
- C. When we encounter that, we need to remember that behavior that seems irrational to the world seems wise to the Lord. Look at his words on the subject in Matthew 5:6. Really, this is what drives Ben and the rest of us. We live in a way the world doesn't live, we make decisions that the world doesn't make, because we hunger and thirst for righteousness. Jesus tells us that that hunger and thirst doesn't make us crazy; it makes us blessed, because unlike all of the other appetites that the world has, our appetite can be filled. Let's look at how this works in our spiritual lives, and how it doesn't work, as we consider, "Blessed are those who hunger."

I. Righteousness and False Paths.

- A. As always, friends, before we discuss a spiritual topic, we need to define what we're discussing. We need to ask, "**WHAT IS RIGHTEOUSNESS?**" For some of the other Beatitudes we've looked at, this was a difficult question to answer, and we had to go around to several different Scriptures to puzzle it out. Not so for righteousness. We just have to look at Luke 1:5-6. This passage tells us that Zacharias and Elizabeth were righteous, and it tells us what they did to be considered righteous. Righteousness, then, is walking blamelessly in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord. If we do that, we are righteous too.
- B. Notice, though, that there are two elements to fulfilling this Biblical standard of righteousness. First, we have to know what the commandments and ordinances of the Lord are. Otherwise, we're like a blindfolded sharpshooter. Unless we can see the target, we aren't going to hit it consistently. We have to know what God wants us to do before we can do it. However, mere knowledge of God's commandments isn't enough. We have to walk blamelessly in those commandments too. To be righteous as Jesus was righteous, we have to avoid doing everything that is evil, but, even more challenging, we have to do everything that is good.
- C. Obviously, righteousness is a tough standard to meet. That's probably why men spend so much time following **FALSE PATHS TO RIGHTEOUSNESS** instead of walking God's path. Scripturally speaking, the first of these false paths is trusting that we already are righteous. Jesus mentions people like this in Luke 18:9. In context, Jesus is most likely referring to the Pharisees, but self-righteousness is still a huge problem today. We see it in the man who refuses to come to church or to obey the gospel because he believes that he's a basically good person and that God is pleased with him just the way he is. This type of person is familiar to all of us, and I fear that on the day of judgment, they're going to get a nasty shock when they learn that their own personal righteousness was not, in fact, sufficient. However, this problem is just as evident in the Lord's church, in Christians who believe that they are earning their way to heaven. They look at the wicked world around them, and it is a wicked world, no doubt about that, and they compare what they do to what the world does, and they go through and list off all their righteous acts and all the world's wicked acts, and they come away from that comparison feeling pretty good about themselves. The problem with doing that, friends, is that when we compare ourselves to the world, we're comparing ourselves to the devil's standard, not to God's standard. All of us can find somebody who's wickedder than ourselves. That doesn't make us righteous.
- D. Likewise, many people turn to hypocrisy as a false path to righteousness. They try to get their approval from men rather than God. Jesus tells us what God thinks of hypocrites in Matthew 23:27-28. Here's what Jesus was talking about: Under the law of Moses, any Jew who touched a dead body became unclean. That meant that just walking over a tomb, even if you didn't know it was there, caused you to become unclean. As a result, the Jews very carefully painted all of their tombs white, so that nobody would touch one by accident. All those whitewashed sepulchers looked beautiful, but the Jews knew they were filled with corruption.
- E. That's what a hypocrite looks like to God. We need to remember, friends, whenever we're tempted to engage in secret sin, that we might fool everybody else, but we can't fool our Creator. He's not impressed when we come strutting in in our church clothes on Sunday morning, but then go home and engage in wickedness all week. Other Christians might not know better, but He does. If we're engaged in secret sin right now, we can be assured that God is keeping track of it, and that we are far indeed from His standard of righteousness.

- F. The third and final false path to righteousness that people take is setting up their own standards of righteousness and following those. Paul describes this behavior in the Jews in Romans 10:2-3. As Paul notes, this behavior most often occurs in people who want to please God, but don't know what God's word teaches. As a result, they make up their own little rules about what is and is not righteous, and they expect God to be pleased when they follow their rules instead of His. This practice is so common in the denominational world. All of us have known people who say that they're going to give up some food for a particular amount of time, or they're going to abstain from some action for a few days or weeks, and that it's going to be some kind of meritorious act that will please God. Brethren, that behavior fits this passage to a T! Those are people who are ignorant of God's will and seek to establish their own righteousness. Of course, such attempts are doomed to failure. If God counts some activity as sin, we need to shun that activity all the time, not just for a month or two each year. If God doesn't consider it sinful, then He doesn't care whether we do it or not. Either way, our search to establish our own righteousness is a waste of time, and it doesn't bring us closer to Him.

II. True Paths and Being Filled.

- A. Of course, if there are wrong answers, there is also a right answer. If there are false paths to righteousness, there is also a **TRUE PATH TO RIGHTEOUSNESS**. We see the first part of this righteous path in 2 Timothy 3:16-17. This is probably one of the passages in all the Bible that I quote most, but in addition to the many other useful things it does, it tells us where we can learn what righteousness is. Only the word of God is profitable for instruction in righteousness. That means that if we want to be righteous, we can't start anywhere other than with the Bible. The world is full of churches that don't teach what the Bible says. Those aren't any good. If we go into any religious bookstore, we'll see shelves and shelves of devotional books. Unless those books are based on a deep understanding of Scripture, they aren't any good either. If we want to know what God wants us to do, we have to go straight to the source. We have to study the Bible, and the more we study the Bible, the better off we will be. That's one of the big reasons why we come together here, so that we can learn about the word. If we study the Scripture with an honest heart, we'll learn all we need to know about the path of righteousness. If we look to anything else, that path will always be hidden from us.
- B. However, just as was true for Zacharias and Elizabeth, true righteousness isn't just about seeing the path. It's about walking the path. John emphasizes the importance of this in 1 John 3:10. This is a very plain statement, and in many ways, it's an intimidating statement. If we don't practice righteousness, we are not of God. Sure, we can talk a good game. Sure, we can show up at services three times a week. But unless we are actually living as God wants us to live, none of the pretty talk matters. Being a disciple of Jesus isn't about listening attentively to sermons. It's about walking as He walked. It's about hating the sin with which Satan attempts to entangle us. It's about refusing every temptation in our path. It's about loving God and His righteousness so much that we seek it at every opportunity, even when that search costs us things that are important to us. It's about embracing even the cross if that's where God wants us to go.
- C. Those things are the true Biblical standard of righteousness. We might come off looking pretty good when we compare ourselves to the world, but none of us look good when we compare ourselves to the word. Just as the Scripture says, there is no one who is actually righteous. If we want to be righteous and serve God, that's a humbling realization. I've been committed to Jesus my entire adult life, but just on the basis of what I've done, when it comes to imitating Him, I'm a miserable failure. So what can I do?
- D. The Scripture tells us that our hunger and thirst for righteousness can only **BE FILLED** through Jesus. Paul explains in Romans 5:18-19. Here's how it works: The struggles that we have with sin aren't unique to us or even to our time. Instead, ever since the beginning, mankind has fallen short of God's standards for righteousness. The problem there is Adam. When he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he opened the door to sin for all the rest of us. Every one of us who has reached the age of accountability is capable of sin, and sooner or later, we all give in. Through Jesus, though, we can return to the righteousness that we forfeited by our own transgression. The blood that He shed on the cross can wash all our sins away. Even though we are sinners, because of His perfect obedience, we can be counted as righteous.
- E. So, then, what do we need to do to tap into that fountain of righteousness that is Jesus? Is it universal? Does Jesus automatically make everybody righteous? Not hardly. Even though we can only be made righteous through Christ and not ourselves, the righteousness of Christ is something we have to look for and find. Paul describes his own quest for that righteousness in Philippians 3:7-9. Paul knew that his own personal righteousness wasn't enough to satisfy God. Instead, he could only be made righteous through his faith in Christ's ability to make him righteous. However, that faith wasn't just mental assent. If Paul had just said, "I believe in Jesus," and kept on living his life as a church-persecuting Pharisee, his actions would have given the lie to his profession of faith. The same is true with us today. If we truly believe in Jesus, if we truly claim Him as our Lord, we won't live like the world anymore. If we truly hunger and thirst for the righteousness that is available in Jesus, we will be willing to give up everything else in our lives to lay hold of that righteousness. Faith requires us to transform our lives, but if we do, our hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled.

Conclusion. If you hunger and thirst for righteousness, fill your need in Jesus tonight.