

**Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they will be filled (Matthew 5:6)**

Voted No. 2 in the influential *Rolling Stone* Magazine's 'Greatest Songs of All Time'

- English rock band, the Rolling Stones' '(I can't get no) Satisfaction' first broke onto the music scene
- In 1965 bringing with it a storm of controversy – making its way to No. 1 in the American charts
- In Britain it was originally played only on pirate radio being thought unsuitable to play on BBC radio
- Because of its themes of alienation, sexual frustration and disillusionment with commercialism
- Nearly 50 years on, people are still looking for satisfaction – look at the magazine rack in any supermarket
- rebellious youth, cravings of all ages for physically and emotionally fulfilling relationships
- aspirational lifestyles (food and drink, homes and gardens, cars, holidays and entertainment)
- are splashed across the cover of nearly every magazine and fill the pages of newspapers too

The year before I was born Prime Minister Harold Macmillan said, 'Britons have never had it so good' (1957)

- and how much has changed since then – Mondays used to be complete drudgery
- but the boiler and mangle have been replaced first by the twin-tub then by the automatic washing machine
- 'essentials' of modern life, the TV, the phone, the fridge, were outside of most people's experience
- Luxury cars, eating out, foreign holidays, expensive food and drink, belonged to a dream-world
- And consumer luxuries that we take for granted today belonged to the world of science fiction
- Anyone thinking that all these things would bring satisfaction was in for a major disappointment
- So it is not so surprising that there has been a tremendous escalation in the abuse of alcohol and drugs
- Many people are alcohol dependant – possibly without even knowing it – but not much has changed
- It appears that ultimately there is no lasting satisfaction in materialism, high-living, alcohol or drugs
- No lasting satisfaction, even in a world of sexual licence – there is something inevitably short-term
- It seems that many things can be thrilling but not satisfying

While the world at large is clearly hungry and thirsty for all kinds of things

- There seems little hope of satisfying this hunger or quenching this thirst
- Multi-millionaire, John Paul Getty, was asked how much money you need to be really happy
- His answer was telling, ‘just a little more’ – ‘worldly’ hunger and thirst cannot be satisfied

The Sermon on the Mount was addressed to disciples, those who had responded to the message of the Kingdom

- Part of that response was repentance (3:2, 4:17) which deals with the wrong in our lives
- The Sermon on the Mount is about both the forgiveness of sins and the transformation of lives
- It opens with ‘the Beatitudes’, a name that comes from the Latin *beatus* (blessed, still the best translation)
- ‘happy’ has been devalued and cheapened in modern usage and, in any event, the focus tends to be inside
- Whereas the focus of the Beatitudes is how we stand before God whose blessing rests on unlikely people
- So much so that the usual order of things is turned upside down, or more accurately, the right way up
- The fourth saying is ‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they will be filled’
- Teaches that real satisfaction to those basic human needs, hunger and thirst, is found in righteousness
- We’ll think about ‘righteousness’ in more detail later – suffice to say for now
- That people in our modern world do not seem to be hungering and thirsting after righteousness
- What about if there is a logical progression in the Beatitudes, we do not hunger and thirst
- Because we are proud rather than meek, because we do not really mourn over our sins
- and because, overall, we are contented in our spiritual poverty
- Hungering and thirsting after righteousness follows on from the previous Beatitudes, in a sequence
- Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the meek
- Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness

## I     RIGHTEOUSNESS

I don't think righteousness has a good feel in modern English; we often associate it with 'self-righteousness'

- That pompous air of superiority that some people seem to wear without much effort
- It's not the same in English but in the New Testament, 'righteousness' and 'justice' are obviously related
- Righteousness is not (as commonly thought) morality
- Jesus is not speaking about leading a good, upright and moral life (commendable as that might be)
- What will happen then is that people become not satisfied but disappointed with their own efforts
- Unless, I suppose, they become self-satisfied – which is unattractive self-righteousness
- Righteousness is about being in a right standing or right relationship with God
- Jesus did not say that those who hunger and thirst after happiness will be filled but righteousness

One of the wonderful things I have been able to do is to spend some time in other countries

- I have enjoyed something about every country that I have visited – but it is possible to get a bit homesick
- Righteousness – being right with God and social righteousness is a characteristic of the kingdom of God
- 'Home' for Christians is the kingdom of heaven, righteousness (both personal and social) is like home
- Righteousness cannot be limited to personal righteousness but must include social righteousness (justice)
- When Christians see things happening in the world that are unjust – we should feel homesick
- Conservative evangelical Christians (like me) have often been cautious about taking social action
- A great Methodist from the last century, Donald English, preached in my church at Mitcham
- He invited us to imagine hundreds of battered bruised and wounded people emerging from a tunnel
- Christians would naturally want to tend to their wounds and offer what love and help they could
- But, as Donald English pointed out, isn't it important to ask, 'who is hitting them?' and do something
- So righteousness is not only personal – it must be social too, we must hunger and thirst after it

## II HUNGER AND THIRST

I have sometimes been heard to say ‘I am starving’ – of course, I am not starving really, just more than peckish

- Real hunger and real thirst are the most intense desires known to human beings – if you are hungry/thirsty
- Very little else seems to matter – this is life and death hungering and thirsting, for righteousness
- The Old Testament spoke of thirsting for the living God (Ps. 42:2; 63:1)
- And Amos said that the deepest spiritual famine is hunger for the word of God (Amos 8:11-14)

A great problem today is poor diet and junk-food – people are eating more than enough of the wrong stuff

- It’s the same with drinking – people are drinking more than enough of the wrong stuff
- In modern Britain, a significant proportion of society is obese but models in the magazines are too thin
- One section of society is eating too much but of the wrong stuff, the other section is not eating enough
- A significant proportion of society drinks too much alcohol, most people do not drink enough water
- These physical disorders have their spiritual counterparts – we are not unaware of spiritual appetites
- We must not push the illustration too hard but it is clear to see that in an attempt to be satisfied
- People are gluttonous for physically and emotionally fulfilling relationships
- aspirational lifestyles (food and drink, homes and gardens, cars, holidays and entertainment)
- Meanwhile, it is also the case that while some people realise the dangers of these excesses
- They are, at the same time, spiritually anorexic – when (spiritually) you do not eat properly
- It is always easy to look for someone else to blame – do we hunger/thirst after righteousness
- Or are we effectively either spiritually obese (unhealthily full of the wrong stuff)
- Or spiritually anorexic (unhealthily empty of the right stuff)?
- Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness for they will be filled, begs the question:
- With what? The answer must be ‘filled with righteousness’, but what does it mean?

### III FILLED

Being filled means being a relationship with God that is complete and satisfying

- This is true blessedness when the void in life which nothing else can fill is filled with the love of Christ
- We cannot earn this satisfaction, we cannot achieve it but we can show that we desire it
- And by faith enter into it – the individual believer can be satisfied, filled by being right with God
- Right with God through faith in Jesus Christ – justified (counted as righteous) by faith
- When this is the deepest longing of our hearts then there is the potential to be satisfied
- What the world craves can only be satisfied by a little bit more, but the believer longs for God

The believer then is charged with spreading the kingdom of heaven throughout the world

- Through the conversion of others (personal righteousness)
- And justice in the world (social righteousness)
- Some of the greatest Christians in the modern era stressed righteousness, both personal and social
- John Wesley, was possibly the greatest travelling evangelist that ever lived
- And yet his work included visiting the sick and imprisoned, a dispensary, an orphanage
- His last letter encouraged William Wilberforce to continue to fight the ‘execrable villainy’ of slavery
- General Booth preached the gospel of redemption, blood (salvation) and fire (sanctification)
- While working among the deprived and destitute, his book *In Darkest England and the Way Out*
- Gave the Salvation Army two battle prongs, the war for souls and the war for a rightly ordered society
- Martin Luther King, Jr., saw the ills of racism, poverty, violence and war had to be addressed
- While the dimension of personal righteousness is fundamental to our understand of the gospel
- We ought not to allow the dimension of social righteousness to be ignored

So, in this fourth Beatitude, Jesus teaches that true satisfaction in life comes only from being right with God

- This is the faith that turns us again and again to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour
- Jesus who died upon the cross so that his righteousness may become ours – we hunger and thirst
- Because we are poor in spirit, because we mourn over sin, because we are not spiritually proud but meek
- Because we realise that all our righteous acts are like filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6)
- Only when we face up to our own state can we really begin to hunger and thirst after righteousness
- But what is the practical application – what can a person hunger and thirsting after righteousness do

It sounds obvious but one important thing to do is to avoid unrighteousness

- I am not a great gardener but I am a great dog lover – and I do know something
- If you want a perfect garden, don't introduce a dog into it – all good gardens exclude dogs
- If you are hungering and thirsting after righteousness, avoid looking for satisfaction in unrighteousness
- one of my colleagues used to tell this story, an older minister told a group of young people
- What he did in the half hour before lunch, he found it particularly helpful for writing a synopsis of a book
- One of the young women objected – in the half hour before lunch, 'I'm cooking it!'
- It's a reminder that if you hunger and thirst after righteousness, time needs to be spent cooking

Something else that I know about gardens is that people with nice gardens are always in them

- They seem to take every opportunity to be in their gardens – the Lord's Day has become the Lord's hour
- Bible study is now discussion group; fellowship has been replaced by friends at church
- Devotional reading has been replaced by paperback Christian books which are not always that great
- Nothing wrong with any of these as such – but we need to hunger and thirst for righteousness
- Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled