

The Great Reversal: Those Who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness

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The enemy, the world, and the flesh want to create a hunger within us for things that don't satisfy and only cause damage. The Holy Spirit wants to give us a deep desire for God and all the things that matter to Him. These are the things that ultimately and completely satisfy our soul.

INTRODUCTION

This evening we come to our fourth beatitude found in Matthew 5:6:

[Matthew 5:6 NKJV] 6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.

Message translation (not one I recommend on its own, but can give you some ideas of what a passage is getting at. 6 “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.”

ILLUSTRATION

Every morning, around 7:00 or so, I hear thuds coming down the hallway at our house, and whipping around the corner, with cowlicked hair and groggy eyes, a growing five-year-old boy topples toward the kitchen with the same two words almost every morning: *“I’m hungry.”* Good morning to you too!

- I understand as I am a breakfast person myself.
- Let’s face it, hunger strikes us all, as does thirst!

TO HUNGER AND THIRST

EVERY PERSON HUNGERS AND THIRSTS:

- It’s part of our human physiology. In order for our cells to reproduce they need energy and nutrients.
- In order for our cells to keep from shriveling up and dehydrating, we need liquid.

TO BE PHYSICALLY HUNGRY & THIRSTY:

We know it. Our stomachs begin to growl. Hunger pains set in and a gnawing longing for some kind of food.

- Scientifically, hunger has been very difficult to nail down.
- Part of the hunger we feel is due to the contraction of our stomach muscles which are triggered by hormones. The creation of these hormones is actually linked back to the brain and certain neurons (AgRP

neurons) which seem to be triggered by a caloric deficiency. You see, there's quite a bit involved in this amazing body God designed just to give us that sensation that makes us say, "I'm hungry, let's get lunch."

- They've also found that outside things can stimulate these brain functions. **For example, a McDonald's sign, a picture of Thai food can make you feel hungry even when you don't need to eat.**
- The same basic triggers apply to thirst. When the body senses an imbalance between salts and liquid, the brain triggers a thirst response.

APPLICATION

TO BE SPIRITUALLY HUNGRY & THIRSTY:

- When it comes to spiritual hunger and thirst, it's more than pathways in the brain that create certain impulses or desires. Sure, the brain has something to do with what we feel and experience, but on a deeper level, our soul comes into play. The soul has deep longings and yearnings that are beyond the comprehension of the mind.
- This is why the Bible frequently uses the word picture of our physical senses to speak of spiritual experiences.
 - [Psalm 34:8 NKJV] 8 Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!
 - [Psalm 63:1 NKJV] 1 O God, You are my God; Early will I seek You; My soul thirsts for You; My flesh longs for You In a dry and thirsty land where there is no water.

ILLUSTRATION

When Jesus was alive within His human body, he ate and drank just like the rest of us.

Yet you might remember when Jesus was in the wilderness and was fasting, Satan came and tempted Him saying, *"If you're hungry, turn these stones into bread."* Jesus responded to Satan, *"man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."*

- The implication of Jesus' words is that **a person is not fully alive just because they are physically alive, and they are not fully satisfied simply because they are physically satisfied.**
- That it's not only the body that feeds and drinks. The mind and the soul also need food in order to be fully alive.
- You see, Satan's temptation to Jesus was way more than trying to appeal to Jesus' physical hunger. **Satan was trying to tempt Jesus to substitute the physical for the spiritual.**
 - What do I mean? It's still a great temptation today. There are invisible parts of our beings that are spiritually hungry, and that can only truly be filled by God. But Satan wants humanity to believe that all they really need is some new physical thing in order to fill that deep void within them.
 - But Jesus taught us by his response that there are things that bread cannot sustain or satisfy. There are things that a car, or any amount of money, or any drug, or relationship, or success, or vacation, or job, or earthly circumstance, or human religion, or spiritual experiences cannot fill within a human being.

Jeremiah 2:13 NKJV – 13 "For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water.

QUOTE

“Life is full of stuff that creates a bloated feeling for a time – that’s why we call it stuff – but it never satisfies our spiritual bellies or slakes our spiritual thirst.”

[Isaiah 55:1-2 NKJV] 1 “Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. 2 Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance.

ILLUSTRATION

I remember growing up deep sea fishing and going to the beach a lot, I would always hear, “Don’t drink the salt water!”

- And of course, salt water might look incredibly appealing when you’re desperately thirsty; after all, it has the appearance of water.
- But we know scientifically that drinking salt water will dehydrate you faster and end up killing you. Not because of the water, but what’s invisibly hidden in the water, the salt.
- When the salt in the water becomes absorbed into your blood, Osmosis takes place. The salt absorbs the water in your cells and your cells shrivel up and die. On top of that, it puts an extra burden on your kidneys which is trying to remove all the excess salt from your blood which, if you don’t die of dehydration, can permanently damage your other internal organs.

INTRO

Jesus lays out a radical truth, especially for us today. Those who want to find genuine and authentic satisfaction and fulfillment in this life and the next must find it by having a spiritual appetite for ONE who is righteous and the things that He says are righteous.

What does it look like to have a deep yearning for God and the things that are of God? God is the very definition of righteousness; everything He is and everything he does, and everything that comes from Him is righteous altogether.

[Psalm 11:7 NKJV] 7 For the LORD is righteous, and He loves righteousness;

We are promised satisfaction if we develop a soul appetite for what is good and right; when we spiritually hunger and thirst for righteousness.

QUOTE

Righteousness –Being right with God that leads to doing right for God.

Josh,

ILLUSTRATION

Nakedness is an interesting thing.

- When human beings come to an age of self-awareness, it is natural for them to want to shield and protect their nakedness from an outside audience. This is not merely a cultural instinct. It goes all the way back to the garden of Eden.
- When Adam and Eve rebelled against God's command not to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, their innocence was removed and their eyes were open to the reality of sin and shame.
- We read in Genesis 3:

Genesis 3:5-7 NKJV – 5 “For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” 6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.

As the story continues, they attempt to hide their nakedness from God, but they aren't able to. They receive the curse of sin, but in doing so, God makes them clothing from animal skins. In essence, the first animal sacrifice is made by God to temporarily cover the nakedness of Adam and Eve that came as a result of their sin.

APPLICATION

All of what happened to Adam and Eve physically was an image of what has happened to every human being since spiritually.

- All of us have inherited a sin nature, a nature that is in automatic rebellion to God. As a result, there is no human being hidden from God's sight, and there is no sin that God does not see.
- Spiritually speaking, we are all spiritually naked before God, our unrighteousness is on display before His presence.

[Hebrews 4:13 NKJV] 13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

APPLICATION

There is coming a day when every person will stand before God. On that day every single one of their actions, decisions, and motives will be completely unmasked and unhidden before the God who knows all.

The Bible tells us:

When we stand before God, the only clothing for our soul that will matter is righteousness. When God looks at you, the only attire that is acceptable in His presence is righteousness clothing your being.

QUOTE

Just like Adam and Eve, humans everywhere continue to sew their own fig leaves to try and cover their spiritual nakedness.

Josh Blevins,

APPLICATION

People have tried every kind of fig leaves, and have hidden behind every kind of bush.

- They have sewn the leaves of human religious effort.
- They have hidden behind the bushes of moral performance.
- *They have tried to create clothing of self-righteousness, good works, and a “my good outweighs my bad” wardrobe.*
- And some might say, “When God sees me, He will probably be pretty impressed with my designer righteousness.”
- Some have tried to hide their shame and spiritual nakedness by pretending there is no God that they are accountable to.
- They are naked in the middle of a busy street but have put a blindfold on and told themselves that no one is looking. It makes them feel a little better, but doesn’t change the reality!
- I have bad news for you! When God sees your own best effort at doing what’s right, thinking what’s right and feeling what’s right, He sees you covered in a bunch of bloodied, menstrual rags.

[Isaiah 64:6 NKJV] 6 But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.

APPLICATION

There is no amount of self-goodness that can adequately clothe us with the kind of righteousness that the perfectly righteous God requires to be accepted. The only way we are going to be accepted is if we are clothed with the garments that God creates for us. Just as God created a temporary covering for Adam and Eve through sacrifice, in Jesus Christ, God has created a wardrobe of eternal righteousness through the sacrifice of His own Son, Jesus Christ.

If you want to find yourself “dressed for the occasion” when you meet God, you must be dressed in righteousness, but not flawed human righteousness, but perfect righteousness. My friend, this is what the cross and the resurrection of Jesus are all about.

The cross is about what we theologically call double imputation. To impute something is to credit something to someone’s account.

2 Corinthians 5 describes what God did by sending Jesus to the earth. Being divine in nature, Jesus was perfectly righteous. He was fully human and embraced human meekness with one exception; He was without human sin. This qualified him as perfectly righteous.

[2 Corinthians 5:19, 21 NKJV] 19 that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

- In Christ, God was not crediting our sin to our account. Rather, He imputed our sin to Jesus’s account.
- At the cross, the unpayable debt in our righteousness account was wiped out. Our spiritual bankruptcy was declared forgiven.
- *But Jesus didn’t merely pay our debt. There was a second computation. He put something in our account on top of that!*

2 Corinthians 5:21 For He made Him (Jesus) who knew no sin (he was clothed in perfect righteousness) to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

- God didn't impute our trespasses against us, but He did impute the righteousness of Jesus to our account.
- This means that ANYONE who is in Christ Jesus through faith is seen by God as clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. That is the basis for our acceptance in His presence!
- He became sin:
 - Would you become the thing you hate the most in order to save the one who actually did that thing you hate the most?
 - Would you look at the rapist and say, "I'll stand before the judge and be viewed as though I committed the rape, open not my mouth when sentenced for the crime, take the just punishment for the crime, and all in the hopes that the person who actually committed it could be forgiven and free."
- Well, Jesus did that for us.

APPLICATION

The one who hungers and thirsts to be clothed in the righteousness of Christ will be filled with the peace of God and the confidence that they are forgiven and accepted by God. Paul had this desire. He said that he wanted to...

[Philippians 3:9 NKJV] 9 ...be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;

Whose righteousness are you counting on to clothe you before God on the day of judgment? Your own or that of Jesus Christ?

Josh, Question

2

Hunger and thirst for God's righteousness to be in us

Those who have been clothed by the righteousness of Christ will become increasingly more righteous as Christ lives through them.

Josh,

CONTEXT

Here we are talking about hungering and thirsting for practical righteousness in your life. Jesus makes us positionally righteous before God, but He also is sanctifying us to become practically righteous while we live on this earth.

- In order to better understand what practical righteousness looks like, we need to know what unrighteousness looks like.
- Unrighteousness could be defined as a thought, action, or word that goes against the nature and character of God.

Romans 1 gives us a good overview of this.

Romans 1:16-19, 29-32 NKJV – 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.” 18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. ... 29 being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, 30 backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, 31 undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; 32 who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.

THE NATURE OF UNRIGHTEOUSNESS

Notice that unrighteousness is not only categorized by evil things that one does, but also by good things one doesn't do.

- Unrighteousness is not only reserved for the one who practices sexual immorality, but also for the one who doesn't practice forgiveness. No only to the one who practices covetousness, but who doesn't practice mercy.

One of the prophetic characteristics of Jesus was quoted by the author of Hebrews. There we read:

[Hebrews 1:9 NKJV] 9 “You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions.”

APPLICATION

One of the identifying marks of someone who has been born again is that their inner cravings begin to desire righteousness and goodness. We don't merely hate lawlessness, but we also love righteousness.

- Having a hunger and thirst for righteousness means that we are now desiring to both cast off the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light. I want to rid myself of envy and maliciousness and strife and sexual immorality, and I want to clothe myself with discernment, trustworthiness, love, mercy, and forgiveness.
- Those who use the grace of God as an excuse to pursue unrighteous behavior or sin show that they have not truly experienced the grace of God.

[Titus 2:11-12 NKJV] 11 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, 12 teaching us that *(God's grace is a get out of jail free card, so live it up, have fun and enjoy the sinful passing pleasures of this life while you have the chance.)*, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age...

APPLICATION

How are Christians supposed to shine as lights and sting like salt if our character and our conduct don't look any different than the ungodly world around us?

- We must be those who hunger and thirst for our lives to reflect the holiness and nature of God, and the goodness and truth of the person of Jesus Christ.

[Ephesians 5:9 NKJV] 9 ...for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth...

3

Hunger and thirst for God's righteousness to come around us

APPLICATION

The ultimate conclusion if we have been made righteous positionally through the righteousness of Christ, and now we love what God loves and hate what God hates so we seek to live righteously, then we should hunger and thirst to see righteousness embraced and implemented in the world around us.

QUOTE

The Christian should be the loudest voice and advocate for God's righteousness in this world.

Josh Blevins,

WHY CARE ABOUT RIGHTEOUSNESS?

The primary desire of God and the mission of the church is to see people made positionally righteous before God through the cross of Jesus Christ.

- *The primary burden for every Christian should be to convey the gospel of Christ and salvation in His name to the unbelieving world around them. Please don't post about social justice if your neighbor of 20 years has never heard you share the gospel with him.*
- *But the Bible is also clear that if we care about the righteousness of God, we will preach the gospel, but we will also preach the full implications of the gospel.*

Matthew 28:19-20 NKJV – 19 “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 “teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.

Teaching them to observe all the things commanded – that is the righteousness of God.

Some Christians today falsely assume that since Christ came, God no longer cares about the righteous or unrighteous behavior of unbelieving humanity. But He absolutely does.

Malachi 3:6 NKJV – 6 “For I am the LORD, I do not change...

[Psalm 7:11 NKJV] 11 God is a just judge, and God is angry with the wicked every day.

- God does care. No, an unbeliever's moral lifestyle won't save their soul, but it does have very real-life implications for all people on the earth.

- God cared about the unrighteousness of Sodom and Gomorrah; God cared about the unrighteousness of Nineveh, Babylon, and Egypt. God cared about Rome, God cared about Nazi Germany, Communist Russia, and socialist Cuba. And yes, don't let God's forbearance and patience give you the wrong impression. God cares about the unrighteousness going on in the United States. The only reason he has yet to destroy all this unrighteous world is because He is patiently waiting so that more would come to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.
- Helpless human lives being taken from the womb matters to God.
- God takes account of those who call evil good and good evil.
- God is still mindful of religious hypocrisy.
- God sees closed-door meetings of politicians where bribes are taken and justice is being perverted.
- God sees the hungry and impoverished person who is neglected.
- God sees racism in every form and in every place.
- God sees ethnic groups being used and abused for political agendas.
- God sees the sex-trafficked girl who is too helpless to find a way of escape.
- God sees the murders on the streets and the abuses in a home.
- God sees the sins that a nation overlooks and refuses to address and WILL HOLD THEM ACCOUNTABLE!
- All these things are on God's radar. He is not ignoring a single one! And one day, He will right every wrong.

Revelation 19:11-16 NKJV – 11 Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. 12 His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. 13 He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. 14 And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. 15 Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. 16 And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

- The lamb who was slain to bring the righteousness of God upon us will one day return as a lion to devour the unrighteous.
- The one who was led as a lamb to the slaughter and opened not His mouth will return to lead the slaughter against every enemy of God with the sword of His word in His mouth to judge the nations.
- Jesus is a passivist... after He destroys all of his enemies.

THE POINT? God cares about righteousness, and so would we. The devil would love for Christians to privatize their faith and limit it to only certain arenas of life. Jesus wants us to publicize our faith and take it into every arena of life.

- Wherever and whenever we have the chance to use our voice or our actions to make the righteousness of God known, we should!
- If we believe that righteousness matters and is right, then we should long to see our homes, our neighborhoods, and our nation embrace what is right and good in the sight of God, not only for our good but for the good of humanity.

[2 Peter 3:11-13 NKJV] 11 Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, 12 looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God,

because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? 13 Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

APPLICATION

One day we will live on a new earth where unrighteousness will no longer exist, but until then, we are the voice of His truth and the voice of what is right and wrong. This doesn't mean we become self-righteous. It doesn't mean we stop loving and serving the lost around us. Our message should always be one of reconciliation. But to love the lost doesn't mean sacrificing the truth or redefining righteousness.

- *We must be full of grace and truth, justice and mercy, righteousness and compassion.*
- *This is what Jesus embodied, and this is what we are to embody.*
- *Jesus was always willing to sit at a table with the unrighteous, but He never called their unrighteousness righteousness, but rather called them to repentance and new life.*

THE PROMISE: THEY SHALL BE FILLED (SATISFIED)

APPLICATION

1.) When you long for the righteousness of God to be on you, you will be filled with confidence and joy in your salvation.

- You will be filled with peace that passes understanding. Your soul will be satisfied in Christ in a way that nothing else in this world can satisfy.
- Once Jesus sat with a woman at a well (John 4) who had a thirsty soul. She tried to fill that thirst with man after man, and relationship after relationship. Jesus looked at her and said, *"He who draws water from this well in the ground will thirst again, but he who drinks the water that I give will never thirst."*
- He echoes that truth again in John 6 when he declared: *[John 6:35 NKJV] 35 "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst."*

QUOTE

"If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world."

CS Lewis, Mere Christianity

APPLICATION

2.) When you hunger and thirst for the righteousness of Christ to shine through you, you will be filled with the fruit that comes from that righteousness.

- By nature of God's natural law, if you sow righteousness you will reap the blessing.
- According to Ephesians 6, righteousness is part of our spiritual armor. It's the breastplate that protects our vital spiritual organs. It guards our hearts and our lives against the attacks and the effects of sin.
- Righteousness has its practical benefits:
 - EXAMPLE: When two people sexually save themselves for their spouse, their intimacy will be long-lasting and rewarding.
 - When people pursue holiness and goodness, they avoid harmful sins that could irreparably damage them and others around them.

- When people are walking in the Spirit and not fulfilling the lusts of the flesh, they will find that their fellowship with Jesus is much deeper and sweeter and fulfilling.

3.) When you hunger and thirst for God's righteousness to be demonstrated around you, you are satisfied by the effects of that righteousness in society.

- I truly believe that one of the greatest reasons we have experienced living in a nation that has experienced the peace and prosperity America has is because historically, America has chosen to stand on the side of righteousness. This isn't to say that America has always honored Christ, or that its behavior has been free from unrighteousness. However, in the areas that America has fought to do what is right in the sight of God, God has honored her and caused her to be satisfied.

Patrick Henry, who is most famous for those seven words, "Give me liberty or give me death," also extensively exhorted the nation in righteousness. Once he penned these words:

"Righteousness alone can exalt America as a nation. Reader! Whoever thou art, remember this; and in thy sphere practice virtue thyself, and encourage it in others... The great pillars of all government and of social life: I mean virtue, morality, and religion. This is the armor, my friend, and this alone, that renders us invincible." –Patrick Henry

Patrick Henry,

INVITATION

[Revelation 3:20 NKJV] 20 "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.

Do you want to feast on righteousness?

- Maybe you are still guilty before God and you need to be covered by the righteousness of Jesus.
- Maybe you have been dabbling or living in sin and unrighteousness and you want to come back to the place of longing for what is pure and good.
- Maybe you've grown calloused and desensitized to the unrighteousness around us and you want God to plant a new passion in you for what is good and right.

Let's spend this time responding to His invitation.

QUOTE

When you feast with God, you will be completely and forever satisfied.

Josh,

'Psalm 107:8-9 NKJV – 8 Oh, that [men] would give thanks to the LORD [for] His goodness, And [for] His wonderful works to the children of men! 9 For He satisfies the longing soul, and fills the hungry soul with goodness.