

The Sermon on the Mount. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Martin Luther King famously said, “We will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like rivers and righteousness like a never ending stream”. He was speaking of social justice in 1960s America, but he was also echoing the Biblical prophets who frequently insisted that reverence for God demanded that God’s people treat fellow human beings made in God’s image with dignity and respect. The world is not impressed with those who make a profession of being religious but don’t play fair. Neither, it seems, is God.

The Lord Jesus was preaching His Sermon on the Mount to those who had expressed an interest in following Him and was spelling out the kind of people the Messiah King requires His subjects to be. And one of the basic principles He has laid down in the opening statements we call the Beatitudes is this: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled”. (Matt 5 v 6)

Martin Luther King was not wrong in applying scripture to the injustice he saw in his day. For a godly person who shares the heart of His Master Jesus, Son of God, cannot help but be grieved by the injustice we witness in the world. Men excluded from work because of race or religion. Women and children killed in the street by chemical weapons. Young girls kidnapped for the sex industry. Such exploitation and abuse stirs in the godly person a righteous indignation. As it doubtless does in the heart of our loving Creator. We long for righteousness – a society that is fair and safe and our faith prompts us to pray and work towards such a world.

But this beatitude has a deeper and more personal application. We long for a better world out there. But we also long for a better, more virtuous way of thinking and acting in ourselves. We hunger and thirst to be better people.

We discover greed or jealousy still living in our hearts and we are not satisfied. We find ourselves thinking or speaking in a manner unworthy of our Master and we are disturbed.

We know we are spiritually poor without God's grace and love. We mourn because of the sins that have separated us at times from our Heavenly Father. We are meekly honest enough to trust for the help we need, living out that humility in the patience and decency we show to others. And we hunger and thirst for righteousness, for all that pleases God. Like starving, desperate people we yearn constantly to be more like our Lord Jesus. We long for more of him in our hearts and lives and daily practice.

In actual fact we all know that often people, ourselves included, hunger after anything and everything BUT Jesus. We are consumed by the desire for money and possessions even though we claim to know they don't bring happiness. We at times seem taken up with being popular, or well-placed, coming out tops, having a good name and reputation. We are desperate when it comes to health, clinging on to this ailing life, though we know it must one day end. We run after the pleasures and distractions of this world, living for the next holiday, or shopping trip or episode of our favourite TV show.

Most of these things are not wrong. Many of them can be quite wonderful up to a point and can be enjoyed with thanksgiving. But when we try to fill our heart and soul with *just* these we come up empty. The 'rich young ruler' had them all but he went away sad because he couldn't buy Jesus and assurance of Heaven quite so easily. Pascal said "Inside every person is a Christ-shaped vacuum which none but He can fill".

If we, like the rich young ruler, try to be the kind of shallow believer who nominally trusts in Jesus just as an extra life assurance for heaven, while all along giving our affection and passion and hunger to lesser things, then we should expect to be dissatisfied, unhappy people. It's like we've tasted the banquet at the top table in the Ritz but have chosen to eat garbage from the bins in a back alley!

True riches, real wealth of heart and soul, according to Jesus, lie in being willing to sacrifice some of the temporary comfort and prestige of this passing world. Live simply and generously. Discover the joy of giving away what we have been given to help those in greater need. Discover the joy of knowing and serving Jesus and becoming fruitful for His eternal Kingdom, even though the world should hate and persecute us. Let them take from us what they will. They cannot take away our freedom (as William Wallace apparently said in at the Battle of Stirling!) – the freedom we are given in Christ.

The freedom that comes when we accept deeply the truth of scripture that those who hunger and thirst primarily for all that pleases God, for a Christ-like heart and life, for the Lord Himself will be blessed and filled.

That those who seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, labouring in love for the spread of the Gospel and the building of Christ's Church will have the necessities of life added unto them by our gracious Father in Heaven.

That He Who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all will also ... along with Him graciously give us all things!

That those who entrust every anxiety to the Lord in prayer with thanksgiving have their hearts and minds kept in Christ with a peace that passes understanding for God is supplying all our need.

We ask and we receive in abundance, we seek and we find our loving Father has it covered, we knock and doors are opened by our Sovereign Lord.

We delight ourselves in the Lord above all else and He gives us the desires of our hearts.

We hope in the Lord and so renew our strength, soaring on wings like eagles.

We hunger and thirst for nothing more but nothing less than Jesus Himself and we are beautifully, wonderfully, gloriously satisfied!

“Now none but Christ can satisfy  
None other name for me  
There’s love and live and lasting joy  
Lord Jesus found in Thee.”

Amen