

The Rock: 04-03-2022**A year with the master**

Title: Blessed are those who hunger and thirst

Scripture: Matthew 5:6 / Luke 23:32-
(black bible Pg. 759/ 830 ESV)

Theme:

What does it mean to hunger and thirst after righteousness? Will we ever be satisfied on our own?

Introduction:

In studying for this particular beatitude, I found myself bouncing back and forth between the two thieves on either side of Jesus and Psalm 34.

Where David, rejected by his king (Saul) and in a sense his people, writes about that event by encouraging his readers to fear the LORD, to seek after Him and be filled with His presence.

-Psalms 34:8-10 (ESV)

"Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good!
Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!
Oh, fear the Lord, you his saints,
for those who fear him have no lack!
The young lions suffer want and hunger; but

those who seek the Lord lack no good thing."

It is quite a picture of Jesus, actually. He too was rejected by His own, the rightful King of Israel who was allowing Himself to be abused and mistreated by the very ones He came to save.

A contrast in so many ways with how people strive after their own righteousness. David, and ultimately Jesus entrusted themselves to God and His provision and care. Even when that meant they would suffer and struggle.

To acknowledge that we try to run after a righteousness of our own making, when things don't work out in a way that we expect or like, or even makes sense for that matter, is helpful.

Hunger and thirsting after righteousness, I am finding is a very difficult thing. Because it is a striving after God, as David declared, and the second thief learned. Not a striving after our own selves.

We are much better people when we hunger and thirst after God, when we taste and see that He is good and His love for us is better than anything this world offers.

The Story:

The contrast seems clear to me, this striving of man and the thief on the cross. Why? Because he, of all people, is least deserving and has nothing to offer Jesus.

Except the acknowledgement that Jesus has been treated unjustly, and was undeserving of this penalty.

In a very frightening scene, we see he and his cohort in crime are actually very deserving of their punishment. One on His right and the other on His left:

-Luke 23:39-40 (ESV)

"One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?"

Get us off these things, miracle worker! Save yourself, and us. The other is a stark contrast, as he recognizes his sin and the fact that he is where he is because he chose a life that had its consequences.

Yet, in his heart, he hears the Holy Spirit speaking to him. This is no foxhole confessional. No, he recognizes Jesus:

-Luke 23:42 (ESV)

"And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

It is a powerful reminder that we are all the sum total of our choices -good ones and bad ones. We are where we are, and who we are because of our decisions.

God always has His hand upon our lives, but we may not always follow that leading. We need to always be aware of this, most especially in a world that fights against any self-responsibility.

Think of parenting - A simple analogy, even if it's not a simple endeavor. We do our best to raise our kids in the instruction of the Lord. But that does not mean that they will always follow, does it?

Yet, even as frustrated and angry as we may get, we do not disown our kids. At least we shouldn't. We don't stop loving them and praying for them. They are after all, our kids.

We are called to hunger and thirst after righteousness, not be perfect performers, but to seek after God every day in what we do, how we think, and in how we react to and respond to others.

That's why David's psalm sticks out, almost haunts me. There is no perfection there, but rather a pure desire to praise, to trust, and to submit to God, to His blessings and righteousness -even in the middle of trial.

Just a couple verses and I leave the rest for you to look at this week: (Ps. 34 and 1 Sam. 21 for background)

-Psalms 34:1 (ESV)

"I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth."

-Psalms 34:4 (ESV)

"I sought the Lord, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears."

-Psalms 34:8 (ESV)

"Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!"

The most important one for us:

-Psalms 34:22 (ESV)

"The Lord redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned."

If given the blessings of God and His grace, it seems clear that we are called to a lifetime of faithfulness to Him. Not

perfection, but faithful obedience to grow in Christ and to live in the way which shows Him to the world.

Yet, it is also clear, as opposite as it sounds, there is nothing at all we need to do or can do to receive God's blessing of righteousness and salvation.

(Paul's commentary and explanation on this)

-Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV)

"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

Rather, it is all because of Jesus and what He accomplished on the cross. We are filled, because He was emptied.

It is a very unsettling scene here in Luke; where Jesus along with two other criminals are being led away to the place of execution:

-Luke 23:32-33 (ESV)

"Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left."

Sad that this is the scene at the end - the King of Glory hung between two guilty men, innocent as He was. He, and this is an old illustration, but a very good one, hangs between two men who would become a reflection of our world.

1- There will be those, who no matter how clear the evidence that Jesus is who He claimed -LORD and Messiah- will simply refuse to believe. Turning away from the forgiveness He offers.

How do I know that? Well, it is what Jesus says about those who are involved in His execution and all who are watching:

-Luke 23:34a (ESV)

"And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Right next to Him, a criminal who hears this says:

-Luke 23:39 (ESV)

"One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!"

Every single person here in Luke's narrative has the same choice to make. They have the same opportunity to hunger

and thirst after righteousness, to put their own self-righteousness aside and look to Jesus and see.

See that He is Messiah, that His righteousness is what makes us whole, fills us and satisfies us.

Do we hunger and thirst? Do we seek after Him in a way that fills us? Think for a minute here. Look over your life and I believe you will find the answer to be both, "not always, but I sure am trying."

(Don't misunderstand: In Christ -We are always fighting against ourselves and our inclinations, and looking to God)

I'm just not sure we recognize it as that. We are so into "performance-based acceptance", that we miss the many times we honor God with simply obeying the small and seemingly insignificant things.

That, even though it's not about performance, it is about faithful obedience and recognizing Him for who He is, and what He is doing in your life.

Those who don't see this -rip His clothes from Him and roll the dice to see who gets to keep them. Others don't get why He is letting this happen, and others well, they just mock Him:

-Luke 23:34-38 (ESV)

"And they cast lots to divide his garments. And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!" The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

Nothing has changed through the millennia. People respond and react in the same ways. Not everyone will hunger and thirst after righteousness, anymore that everyone will be saved.

That is a hard truth to swallow. God desires no one to perish, but for all to come to Him.

But not all want to come to Him, and in His sovereignty, He has determined not to violate our "free will" or choice to do what we want.

Thus, the importance of hungering and thirsting after righteousness. We have to choose to do that, even when it hurts.

David was in trial and had been rejected, yet He sought after the LORD. Jesus, rejected and condemned, He seeks after

God and in it all forgives those who are abusing Him.

You see, love cannot be love if we cannot choose it. It is then nothing more than a forced compliance. That's not love-but LAW.

Christ's love, Paul tells us, compels us, drives us and draws us. We want to seek after Him, to hunger and thirst after Him in our day to day lives.

The comfort in this passage comes in the form of the second thief. Because he represents the second group of people in this world.

2- Those who understand who Jesus is and respond. Doing so by recognizing that not only do they have nothing to offer Him -except themselves - they don't need to bring anything except, like this thief:

The admission that he deserved the punishment, and that Jesus somehow would forgive him. There is no formed theology here giving this guy any kind of deep understanding of God's "Salvation" and all the things.

No, he just knew that somehow, because of what was happening to Jesus in that moment, unjust as it was, somehow that meant he could be forgiven.

-Luke 23:40-42 (ESV)

"But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Here is the King, the Messiah - this thief finally realized the truth of this and what it really meant for him and anyone who would come after him.

I've done nothing to deserve a positive response to my request, except the fact that I recognize that you alone can actually honor my request. So, please remember me when you get there, Jesus.

I've shared this before, that story of the guy who came up to the gates of heaven, looking all ragged and beaten. When he was asked why he was there and did he think he belonged, he said:

"I don't know if I deserve to be here, but the man on the middle cross told me I could come."

-Luke 23:43 (ESV)

"And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."

This man understood that all he had to offer was a broken life full of bad choices -and an admission that because of that, he needed Jesus.

That's it. That is all we need as well. Coming to Jesus in that way, drives you to seek after, to hunger for Him, to thirst for Him and His righteousness.

He promises to fill you. Not when you "get there", but today, right now, in your need and desires and struggles. The hunger to get to know Him better will be satisfied.

The fact that this man had zero time in life to do anything to earn or deserve God's love is huge! Why? Because, that paints such a clear picture for us that neither do we.

Even if we have a lifetime to prove it, to perform or to do things -none of that is why God loves us. Paul makes that clear as he writes to another young pastor, Titus:

-Titus 3:4-7 (ESV)

"But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he

saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

It is such a freeing and liberating things. Today, for the thief, he would fully understand that he, a sinner, far worse than he could really know, discovered that he was loved by God far more than he could ever understand.

The only thing he needed to do was confess with his mouth. (Romans 10) His obedience in his life was a nano-second compared to others, but it was that simple act of faith that took away his hunger and his thirstiness.

Too often we overcomplicate things. It's the performance-based attitude we all have. Born out of our views of our earthly parents, and the culture.

Blessed are you who hunger and thirst after righteousness -you will be satisfied (filled).

It's not a conditional thing, or even a positional thing. It's a Jesus thing, an faithful obedience thing.

Honestly, and with this I'm done, even though we do this less than we should, we do it far more than we know. We miss it because we judge ourselves based on our perception of acceptance and performance.

Forgetting that Jesus, because of what He did, has leveled the curve.

So, taste and see that the Lord is Good. For, in the words of David:

-Psalms 34:19-22 (ESV)

"Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all. He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken. Affliction will slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be condemned. The Lord redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned."

That's a promise of God.

(Communion week)