

Main Idea: In Matthew 5:6-7 Jesus continues to give us a picture of God’s kind of people by showing two more characteristics.

I. The Hungry and Thirsty (6)

- A. We need righteousness.
- B. We desire righteousness.
- C. We refuse to settle for junk food righteousness.
- D. We receive righteousness from the only one who can give it.

II. The Merciful (7)

- A. The merciful resemble God.
- B. The merciful treat sinners the way God treats them.
- C. The merciful take sin seriously, but do so the way God does.
 - 1. The self-righteous conceal their sin.
 - 2. Those who confess their sin receive mercy.
- D. The merciful continue to receive the mercy they continue to need.

Take Inventory: Some questions to ask ourselves...

- 1. What am I hungry for today?
- 2. Would I rather be righteous or right?
- 3. Would people describe me as merciful?

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 55

Jesus said many shocking things that just don’t compute in the mind of the natural man. In fact, they don’t compute in the mind of the nominal Christian. For instance, as we’ll see this morning, He said that the blessed person is one who is hungry, thirsty, and merciful. To the world, that’s nonsense. To Jesus, it’s the truth about who has eternal life, and it’s a sobering indicator of who doesn’t.

Who is a Christian? How do you identify a true Christ-follower? If a person *says* they are a Christian, does that make them so? Is it a person who goes to church, reads their Bible, and prays before meals? Or is it a person who cares for the needy, helps the hurting, stands up for righteous causes? The reality is that a person can do all those activities that I just mentioned and be a Christian or *not* be a Christian, case in point, Judas Iscariot.

This is not a trivial matter. Millions of people identify themselves as Christian in our country. They say they believe in Jesus. They believe they are going to heaven. We are in that number.

And Jesus has a message for us. It’s called *the sermon on the mount*, and it’s to that sermon that we return this morning, in Matthew 5-7.

Why did Jesus preach what many would consider to be His most famous sermon? He had launched His public ministry in chapter four by preaching, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near (4:17).” He went throughout the country preaching, healing every disease and sickness, and casting out demons. News spread far and wide. Large crowds of people began to follow Him, says 4:25.

Does following Jesus mean a person is now a Jesus-follower? Maybe. Maybe not. It’s at this point, “when Jesus saw the crowds,” says Matthew 5:1, that the Lord went up on a mountainside on the northwest side of the Sea of Galilee, and preached the message we’re considering.

** Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the series preached at WBC in 1988.

To whom did He speak? Directly, to His disciples. “He began to teach *them*,” says Matthew 5:2. But indirectly, to the crowds who were listening in. He wants them to know the nature of the kingdom of heaven, of His kingdom, and what life will be like should they truly follow Him.

There are two purposes for this sermon.

1. Corrective--The Sermon on the Mount is corrective for non-believers. He corrects their false views about the kingdom He had come to establish.

2. Instructive--The Sermon is instructive for genuine believers. Jesus instructs us about the cost involved in being a Christian, about the standard for following Christ. Jesus is saying to His followers, "Because you are a Christian, this is how you will live." The Sermon is instruction given by Jesus to his disciples describing his expectations for their behavior as citizens of His kingdom (Stott). Jesus is describing "KINGDOM LIFE" for His followers. We're calling the series, "Kingdom Living 101."

Jesus begins with eight beatitudes. He paints a picture with words so that His followers and those who would be His followers know exactly what's coming.

Back in the 60s, Vince Lombardi took the helm of the Green Bay Packers. His nonsense approach to coaching led the ill-respected Packers to two consecutive Super Bowl victories. The coach made his expectations clear to his players, "If you want to play on this team, these are the training rules."

Good coaches make their expectations clear. So do good parents. And good teachers. And so does the King of kings. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus communicates what's expected of His followers.

He begins in verse 3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Who is going to heaven? Who possesses His kingdom? The poor in spirit do. Jesus begins by going for the heart of the matter. His kingdom belongs to those who don't deserve to be there and admit it. The poor—they don't have anything, they're destitute. The poor in spirit—they don't have anything to offer to God that would merit His favor. *Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling.* This is the cry of the poor in spirit.

And cry they do. Verse 4, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." When you see yourself as God sees you, as one who has broken the law of God, you not only admit your spiritual poverty, but you're heartbroken over it. You're grieved over it. You mourn over it. You hate your sin, not just the consequences of it, but sin itself and what it means to God.

This is the blessed person, says Jesus. Not the person who has his act together, but the person who admits he doesn't and feels it deeply. But it doesn't stay hidden. Others begin to see it too.

Verse 5, "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." When you're spiritually bankrupt and admit it, and not just admit it but grieve over the reality of it, it begins to show up in your disposition, in the way you carry yourself. You become meek. Not weak, but just the opposite, for meekness is power under control. Blessed are those who know they belong to the kingdom of heaven though they don't deserve to be there, and this knowledge affects the way they view others. They are humble. They are meek. And they will inherit the earth.

Amazing. The kingdom of heaven, the comfort of God, the coming paradise in the new earth...to whom is this given? To those who deserve it? To the good people of this world? No. To the undeserving, says Jesus. To those who mourn over their sinfulness. To those who mortify their pride and become something they never were before. Meek.

“So that’s it? Admit you are a broken sinner, mourn over that fact, become meek, and you go to heaven?”

No. Hold on. Hell will be filled with people who agreed with the fact that they were sinners and even shed tears over it. There’s a progression in Jesus’ beatitudes. They’re a package and work together. One leads to the next, to the next.

For the true Jesus follower, something happens next. The spiritual poverty, the mourning, the meekness, leads to the fourth beatitude.

I. The Hungry and Thirsty (6)

Verse 6, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.” Who are the blessed people, those that have God’s approval?

Those who hunger and thirst. We know all about hungering and thirsting. Those are powerful longings and desires we feel, and they kick in when our bodies are in need. In fact, when they kick in it’s hard to think of anything else (which is why we need grace to hear a sermon on Sunday morning a half hour before lunchtime).

But what is it that the blessed person hungers and thirsts for? *Righteousness*, says Jesus. Jesus teaches us four things about righteousness.

A. We need righteousness. The first man and woman on planet earth were created righteous. Because Adam and Eve were righteous, God walked with them, and they with God. Can you imagine what it was like? To walk with God a person must be righteous.

Then came Genesis 3. “When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it (6).”

And everything changed. Righteousness was gone. “Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden (8).” “Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin,” explains Paul in Romans 5:12.

My friend, righteousness is our biggest need, and we will remain separated from God forever if we don’t receive it. But it’s not just that we need righteousness. We *desire* it.

B. We desire righteousness. Jesus says the blessed person desires what Adam and Eve had and lost. The blessed person hungers and thirsts for it. He lacks righteousness. This is why he’s poor in spirit and mourns. He knows something is missing, without which he cannot see God. And He desires it more than anything else.

Hungering is a longing, a consuming focus. The blessed are not those who have got their act together, but those who long for what they don’t have and could never attain on their own. As Jesus will say in a few moments, “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (6:33).”

We need to think about righteousness more than we do. Consider this...

Proverbs 14:34 “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin condemns any people.”

1 Samuel 26:23 “The Lord rewards everyone for their righteousness and faithfulness.”

Ezekiel 18:20 “The one who sins is the one who will die. The child will not share the guilt of the parent, nor will the parent share the guilt of the child. The righteousness of the righteous will be credited to them, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against them.”

2 Peter 3:13 “But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.”

Do you want to walk with God in the new heaven and earth? Then you need righteousness, for in that holy place righteousness dwells.

So what does it mean to hunger and thirst for righteousness? Listen to Martin Lloyd Jones, “To hunger and thirst after righteousness is nothing but the longing to be holy...to long to be like the New Testament man, the new man in Christ... It means that one’s supreme desire in life is to know God and to be in fellowship with Him, to walk with God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in the light... In the end that is nothing but a longing and desire to be like the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.”²

“So how do we get this righteousness?” you ask.

Good question, and we’ll answer it in a moment. But first, we need to talk about the problem of what I’ll call junk food righteousness.

C. We refuse to settle for junk food righteousness. What’s junk food righteousness? It’s anything that I do to make me think I’m alright with God based on my merit. Like doing religious things. I go to church. I read my Bible. I give money to help others. I give up things at Lent. And on the basis of these things that I have done, I convince myself I am now right with God.³

Religion is junk food righteousness. All religion is. Doing religious things produces a righteousness of sorts. Jesus talked about that in 5:20 when He said, “For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and teachers of the law, you will certainly not inherit the kingdom of heaven.” That’s called self-righteousness, but it’s not *the* righteousness God requires.

It’s worth noting there is a definite article in the text, “Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for *the* righteousness.” Not a partial righteousness which is all our best efforts can produce. “There is no one righteous, not even one,” says Romans 3:10. “No one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law,” says Romans 3:20.

Here’s a good question to see if you’re settling for junk food righteousness. If you died today and were standing at the gates of heaven and the Lord said, “Why should I let you into my presence?” what would you say to Him?

“I tried to live a good life, Lord. I did not best.” To the One who is perfect, that’s junk food righteousness.

“I was baptized and worked in the church faithfully.” To the One who says that all our righteous deeds are as filthy rags, that too is junk food righteousness.

If I am satisfying myself with junk food righteousness, I won’t hunger for the righteousness that I need. And I certainly won’t hunger for it, as Jesus says the blessed person does. Lloyd Jones is right, “We are not hungering and thirsting after righteousness as long as we are holding with any sense of self-satisfaction to anything that is in us, or to anything that we have ever done.”⁴

By the way, there are many things that, though they may not be wrong in themselves, tend to diminish our appetite for the true righteousness of God. It’s why your mother said, “No, you can’t have the candy bar now. It’s 4:30 and we’ll be eating supper soon.”

“I’m not getting much out of the Bible these days.” When I find myself thinking that, there’s a pretty good chance I’ve been spoiling my appetite for the things of God. Like, television, sports, Facebook. Nothing inherently wrong with these things, but they have a

² Lloyd-Jones, p. 79.

³ To see what God thinks of our religious attempts to secure favor with Him, look at Micah 6:6-8.

⁴ Lloyd Jones, p. 88.

tendency to curb my appetite. How about you? What are the things that tend to dull your hunger pangs for God and His righteousness?

Listen to Jesus, dear friend. Who is the blessed person? Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. And here's the blessing. "For they will be filled." Notice the passive. Those who are blessed don't fill themselves. They admit they can't. Righteousness is something they receive. From whom?

D. We receive righteousness from the only one who can give it.

Romans 3:21-22, "But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known... This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe."

Romans 1:16-17, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.¹⁷ For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last."

They shall be filled. "The whole gospel is there," says Lloyd-Jones. "That is where the gospel of grace comes in; it is entirely the gift of God. You will never fill yourself with righteousness."⁵

Righteousness is what Christ is (1 Cor 1:30). Righteousness is what Christ gives (2 Cor 5:21). Righteousness is what new covenant ministry produces (2 Cor 3:9). Righteousness is what we live for (1 Pet 2:24).

So you could actually change the word in verse 6, from "righteousness" to "Christ", for 1 Corinthians 1:30 says, "He [Christ] is our righteousness." "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for Christ, for they will be filled."

Who is the true Christian? It's the person who, by God's grace, has become honest about his sin and the implications of it and is now poor in spirit. It's the person who then mourns over this sin problem he cannot fix, who, rather than being proud of his attempts to patch things up with God, becomes meek and begins to hunger and thirst for what he knows he cannot produce but must receive. Which he does, when by the grace of God, he receives the gift of righteousness through faith in the Righteous One, Jesus Himself.

Yet there's more. There's something you need to know about this filling. As Lloyd-Jones puts it, "The Christian is one who at one and the same time is hungering and thirsting, and yet he is filled. And the more he is filled the more he hungers and thirsts."⁶

So God takes away the hunger and replaces it with another hunger. This means we don't stop being hungry. We just start being satisfied while we're hungry. We hunger for righteousness. And God satisfies that hunger by giving us Christ. And so we hunger even more, for Christ, for the righteousness He intends to produce in and through us, for others to know it too, all to His glory.

Not long ago a good pastor friend of mine shared something personal with me that God was teaching him and his wife. He said they'd been talking, and the talking turned into an argument, and it dawned on him what was happening. "My problem," he said, "is that I'd rather be right than righteous."

I've thought about that a lot since he told me and realize that's my problem too. Far too often I'd rather be right than righteous. And Jesus shows me that needs to change. Blessed are those who hunger, not to win arguments, not to be right, but hunger for righteousness, for Christ Himself to be seen in and through me. That's the person who will be filled.

But it doesn't stop there. In the next beatitude Jesus takes it a step further.

⁵ Lloyd-Jones, p. 81.

⁶ Lloyd Jones p. 83.

II. The Merciful (7)

The first four beatitudes pertain primarily to our attitudes towards God. The second four deal with our attitudes towards other people. Like the Ten Commandments, the first section addresses the vertical, the second section the horizontal.

Verse 7 “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.”

What does it mean to be merciful? Four things are true of the merciful.

A. The merciful resemble God.

At its root, merciful is what God is.

Deuteronomy 4:31 “For the LORD your God is a merciful God; he will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant with your forefathers which he confirmed to them by oath.”

Nehemiah 9:31 “But in your great mercy you did not put an end to them or abandon them, for you are a gracious and merciful God.”

Jeremiah 3:1 “Return, faithless Israel, declares the LORD, I will frown on you no longer, for I am merciful, declares the LORD.”

When we are merciful we are like God. When we are not merciful, we are not like God. In His grace, He gives us what we don't deserve. But in His mercy He chooses *not* to give us what we do deserve.

B. The merciful treat sinners the way God treats them.

Let this sink in. We are people who have not received what we deserve. Because God is merciful, He has not treated us the way we deserve to be treated for what we have done to Him.

When we choose to be merciful, we are choosing to treat others as God has treated us. Think of it this way. Earlier we considered Jesus' challenge to be meek. To be meek is to acknowledge to others that we are sinners. To be merciful is to have compassion on others, for they are sinners too.

Is there a need for merciful people today? Mark Twain once confessed, "I never killed anybody, but I've read some obituaries with delight."

Jesus spoke in Aramaic. The word that he used for "merciful" is untranslatable by one English word. It means more than to sympathize, more than to feel sorry for someone who is in trouble. Mercy is the ability to get right inside another person's skin until we can see things with his eyes, think things with his mind, and feel things with his feelings. It's more than an emotion. It involves deliberate identification with another person, as the Indians used to say, "to walk a mile in their moccasins."

"Sympathy" is a good related word. In the literal sense "sympathy" is derived from two Greek words—syn = together with + paschein = to experience or suffer. Sympathy means "experiencing things together with the other person, literally going through what he is going through".

But we have a problem. As sinners we don't do this naturally. We don't try to and we don't want to. Because of our sin nature, we are too wrapped up in our own feelings to be concerned for the feelings of others.⁷

But when Jesus enters our lives He gives us a new nature. His nature. If you want to see merciful, look at Jesus. In the person of Jesus Christ, God got inside the skin of mankind.

⁷ Look at the Old Testament prophets and what do you see? The needs of people bothered them. Amos cried out against the social injustices of his day, "But let justice run down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream (5:24)."

He came as a man. He came seeing things with men's eyes, feeling things with men's feelings, thinking things through men's minds. "God became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).

And now He says, "Blessed are those who are what I am."

Consider the little child's prayer at bedtime: "Dear Lord, please make all the bad people good. And please make all the good people nice." Why is it that so many Christians are hard to get along with? Perhaps it's because they have forgotten that they have received mercy.

We who are the recipients of God's mercy are now commissioned by Christ to be the distributors of mercy. When Christ is real in our lives, other people see it. Other people *feel* it.

Blessed are the merciful. Listen again to Martin Lloyd Jones, "The best definition of the two [grace and mercy] that I have ever encountered is this: 'Grace is especially associated with men in their sins; mercy is especially associated with men in their misery.' In other words, while grace looks down upon sin as a whole, mercy looks especially upon the miserable consequences of sin. So that mercy really means a sense of pity plus a desire to relieve the suffering. That is the essential meaning of being merciful; it is pity plus the action."⁸

"So being merciful means I'm supposed to just overlook people's sins?" No.

C. The merciful take sin seriously, but do so the way God does.

What does that mean? We find the answer in Proverbs 28:13. "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy." Notice that. Who receives mercy? The person who confesses and renounces his sin. Not the person who tries to hide the sin, who denies it, who makes excuses for it, who wants to act like everything is okay. That person doesn't experience mercy. Think of it this way.

1. *The self-righteous conceal their sin. But...*

2. *Those who confess their sin receive mercy.*

This is how God deals with sin. He's merciful, yes, but to experience His forgiveness a person must confess and renounce their sin. And so we are to do with others. Being merciful is not being soft on sin. At the cross of Jesus we have a solution for our sin problem, so we keep pointing the sinner to the cross. You need to repent. You need to forsake your sin.

And until they do we are merciful towards them. Merciful in rebuking and calling for repentance. Merciful in the way we treat them until they do repent, and even if they don't. We treat people the way God treats us.

You say, "That's a high standard. Is it worth it?"

Oh yes, and here's why. "Blessed are the merciful, for *they shall receive mercy.*"

D. The merciful continue to receive the mercy they continue to need.

I want to take time to read a story. It's lengthy but worth it. It shows us what this fifth beatitude looks like in living color. In his book, *When Sinners Say I Do: Discovering the Power of the Gospel for Marriage*, Dave Harvey shares the following in chapter five, which is entitled, "Mercy Triumphs Over Judgment":

Gordon and Emma met at a church function. She was an admirable young woman, and he was a fairly new pastor. Their wedding day seemed to be the launch of a godly couple in the promise of fruitful ministry in the decades ahead. But just a few days into their honeymoon, all of Emma's dreams for her life were crushed. Gordon made it clear that he didn't love Emma, and that he had married her simply because there were more opportunities for married pastors than single ones.

For forty years, through the birth of six children, and the while functioning as a pastor, Gordon made no meaningful attempt to kindle love for his wife. Freely admitting

⁸ Lloyd Jones, p. 99.

to an adulterous affair that began after the birth of their fourth child, Gordon insisted he must remain married – divorce would derail his pastoral career. Marriage for Emma became a life of secret shame. She was relegated to sharing a room with their two daughters, while her husband stayed in a separate room, and their four sons in another.

Gordon's disregard for Emma permeated almost every facet of their marriage. While she continued to live under the same roof, she never experienced life under his care. Seemingly normal on the outside, Gordon's disdain for his marriage created a home ruled by his hypocrisy and indifference to his wife's well-being. His children grew up with a clear sense of the difference in their family and others, but little grasp on the fundamental wrong being done to their mother on a daily basis.

But Emma loved the Savior who was merciful to her and clung to him through the trials and years. Bereft of human love from the man she had wed, she threw herself on the mercy of God. The gospel reminded her that she needed a Savior – and that her principal need was not to be saved from a cruel twist of fate, or the evil of the man who shared her home, but from her own profound sinfulness before God. Emma understood the mercy and forgiveness of God for her sin, and accepted the Father's call to extend mercy toward her husband. Emma never allowed bitterness to take root in her heart. Instead she learned how to stand with dignity by entrusting her welfare to Christ.

For four decades, mercy defined her actions, thoughts, and words toward the man whose very purpose in life seemed to be to crush her spirit. Knowing that her response to her husband would testify to her children about the God she served, Emma was resolutely determined to draw on Christ for grace and to honor Christ in her actions.

The marriage ended sadly and painfully after forty years – an apparent ministry call squandered, a financially destitute family shattered by the unrepentant sin of one man. In the years following their divorce, Emma sent Gordon birthday cards and periodic letters, calling the lonely and rebellious man to God. She was tasting the sweet joy of a deep relationship with the Father, and increasingly longed for Gordon to know that for himself.

Somewhere in that time, the mercy of God broke in on Gordon and he responded to the gospel call in saving faith. The children, now adult Christians, lovingly confronted him on his past sins, and for the first time Gordon took responsibility for the destruction of his family. Gordon wrote a letter to Emma confessing his sin against God and against her. Emma was faced with the test of forgiveness. Can it be that easy? Can mercy cover forty years of wrong? We have Emma's choice preserved in the note she wrote back to her former husband:

It is with mixed emotions that I read your letter. Sad, as I was reminded of many difficult years, but also glad for the work the Spirit of God is doing in your life. Glad to hear you share your failures so frankly and ask for my forgiveness. And glad to hear you share them with your children. Gordon, I forgive you. I forgive you for not loving me as Christ loved the church and for your disregard of our marriage vows. Though I am saddened by many marriage memories, I have released them to the Lord and have guarded my heart from the ravages of bitterness. I rejoice in the mercy of God, that in spite of our failed marriage, our children all serve the Lord faithfully....God uses confession and forgiveness to bring healing. I'm trusting God that will be true for both of us.

Both Emma and Gordon have gone on to be with the Savior, who wove restoration into a torn family with the strong threads of mercy. All of their children love the Savior and now see the mysterious purpose of God as they look back. Though Emma and Gordon were never restored as husband and wife, Gordon was laid to rest in old age, no longer alone, surrounded not only by his family but by the friends of his church with whom he had knit his life. Emma's body gave in over time to stroke, but her spirit and story define a work of God that transcends the failure of marriage and touched many lives.

For Emma, mercy had triumphed over judgment decades before Gordon repented. Mercy triumphed with every prayer cast heavenward, every sin covered in love, every refusal to grow bitter. For Gordon, mercy meant getting what he didn't deserve – the forgiveness of his sins, the love of his family, a home with the Savior, six God-honoring children, Emma's life-long love of Christ. Each of these remarkable outcomes point to the triumphant sweetening effect of mercy – the remarkable mercy Emma received from God and lavished on her family.”⁹
“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.”

Take Inventory: Some questions to ask ourselves...

1. *What am I hungry for today?* The Lord Jesus told a parable in Luke 15:11 about a wayward son who foolishly asked for his inheritance, and then squandered it by wild living. When the money was gone, things got bad for him. He lost his friends. He lost his home and security. Things were really tough. You know the story. When the prodigal son was hungry, he went to eat the husks that the pigs left behind. But when he was starving, he returned to his father.

Blessed is the person who hungers and thirsts for righteousness, for the Righteous One Himself, Jesus Christ. What are you hungry for today? What steps are you taking to satisfy that hunger? What steps do you need to take?

2. *Would I rather be righteous or right?* That's a good question for each of us to ask ourselves as we assess the way we're relating to our spouses, our kids, our parents, our church family. When a tense moment arises, ask this. Would I rather be righteous or right?

3. *Would people describe me as merciful?* How can I exhibit mercy today?

⁹ Taken from Dave Harvey's book [*When Sinner's Say I Do: Discovering the Power of the Gospel for Marriage*](#) (pages 77-78, 94-96). Found online at <https://pastoral-theology.com/2013/09/16/mercy-triumphs-over-judgment/>