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All words spoken by Jesus Christ are in **red text**.

Jesus declared, **“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.”**  
**Matthew 5:6**

Jesus used what we understand within the physical realm to explain spiritual truths. This is exemplified by His comparison of physical hunger and thirst, with spiritual hunger and thirst—because the two are similar. To more fully understand this correlation, we will begin by exploring the dynamics that occur when we are hungry for food, or thirsty for drink.

The degree (or intensity) of our hunger and thirst will influence and drive our behavior. For example, when we are a little hungry or somewhat thirsty, we can continue to do whatever we are doing, our thoughts and motivations remain focused upon those things at hand, and we can delay fulfilling our need for food and drink. However, as we become hungrier and thirstier—especially if we reach a point of being famished and parched—the focus of our attention and behavior will transition from what we are doing, to what must we do to obtain food and drink to fulfill the demands of our body. Those things that were important and had our attention will quickly “take a back seat” until our physical needs are met.

Another interesting characteristic of physical hunger and thirst is that the “filling effects” of food and drink last for a short period of time. We will become hungry and thirsty again, and we will want more food and drink. For in truth, the demands of our body require continual “filling.”

From a spiritual perspective, the demands by our body for continual filling of food and water are similar to the demands by our body (aka our flesh) for sin. Jesus explained in John 8:34, **“Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.”** Those who are a slave to sin may find a temporary “fulfillment” for their lustful cravings. However, they will become “hungry and thirsty” again, and will engage in more sin to fulfill the demands of the flesh. Meanwhile, the cycle of sin creates a stronger slavery to the sin, deeper darkness, and delusional lies to justify the sin.

### **Characteristics of Spiritual Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness**

The focus of the declaration by Jesus in Matthew 5:6 was based upon our hunger and thirst (desire) for righteousness. The biblical meaning of righteousness may be defined as morally correct behavior that aligns with the desires of God.

Jesus knew there is a comparative similarity between our physical hunger and thirst for food, and our spiritual hunger and thirst for righteousness. Those who have a little hunger and thirst for righteousness will likely continue doing whatever they are presently doing. However, those who realize they are spiritually “starving and dehydrated” will actively seek to fulfill the needs of their heart and soul. And, unlike physical food, water or sin, the benefits of the spiritual food and water Jesus provides are satisfying to the soul. Jesus declared:

- **“I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.”** John 6:48-51
- **“Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.”** John 4:14

Jesus also said those who hunger and thirst after righteousness are blessed. Due to our sinful nature, we do not desire God and will rebel against His righteousness. As such, if a person develops a hunger and thirst for righteousness—it is because of the influence and workings of the Holy Spirit—and therefore are blessed by God. These blessings are revealed in the following words of Jesus:

- “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things.” John 14:26
- “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.” John 6:44

It is the Holy Spirit who illuminates one’s condition in darkness, and it is the Holy Spirit who draws us to God by creating a deep and motivating desire within the heart to seek freedom from the consequences of sin and unrighteousness, such as:

- Internal turmoil and uncontrollable emotions such as guilt, shame, hatred, anger, and fear.
- Overpowering addiction, dependence, and compulsive behaviors.
- A repressed awareness they are causing harm to themselves and others.
- The possibility of living for eternity in hell.

Jesus Christ—God’s Son who willingly gave His life as a sacrificial atonement for our sins—who gave us a means to be forgiven—summarized the difference between a heart that desires righteousness, and a heart that prefers unrighteousness. “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.” John 3:18-21

Jesus also declared, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” Matthew 5:8

### **How Do I Attain the Righteousness of God?**

Whenever we evaluate ourselves by considering our thoughts, reflecting upon our behavior, and analyzing our words...we will often not see the righteousness of God, but rather, the ugliness of our sinful nature. What’s more, if we also consider aspects of ourselves that we think are righteous—when compared to God’s righteousness—we quickly realize how far we fall short of God’s definition of righteousness. “But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags.” Isaiah 64:6

Jesus said, “For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 5:20

God gave the Israelites (via Moses) the Law—which was comprised of behavioral standards that defined His minimal expectations for righteousness. In addition, God also gave the Israelites a means to receive forgiveness if they failed to adhere (or sinned) by breaking God’s laws (such as one of the Ten Commandments).

Scribes studied the Law, transcribed (made copies of) the Law, interpreted the Law, and taught the Law. The Pharisees were a religious group within Judaism that strictly adhered to every aspect of the Law. Their perceived righteousness was based upon their complete compliance with the Law.

If you evaluated the lives of the scribes and Pharisees, you would likely agree their behavior and actions complied with the standards defined by God. They even added additional laws to make sure each Israelite kept within strict “boundaries of behavior.” And, based upon their commitment to compliance and flawed human reasoning, one can understand why they considered themselves as being righteous—because they adhered to God’s laws. However, they completely missed the point of God’s grace via the Law, and His forgiveness of their sins via the sacrifice of animals. They sought righteousness via their self-will and determination to comply, and not by the transformational power of God’s grace and forgiveness.

Spiritual truth: God is more interested in the desires of our heart to seek and know Him, than our futile efforts to become righteous.

Click this link [Matthew 23](#) to read how Jesus confronted the scribes and Pharisees by declaring their self-centeredness, hardened hearts, and hypocrisy—which are consequences of human attempts to become the righteousness of God.

So, here are a couple of questions to consider. Determine which one is true.

1. Do you think God would ask something of us that we are unable to accomplish?
2. Do you think God would provide us with a means to become what He desires?

Important spiritual truths:

1. It is impossible to attain the righteousness of God based upon our own self-will and efforts.
2. We are completely dependent upon God for everything, including our righteousness.
3. If we were able to attain the righteousness of God on our own:
  - a. The sacrificial death of Jesus Christ was in vain.
  - b. We would be filled with self-centered pride, our hearts would harden, and we would fail to love God and others as God loves us.
4. Righteousness is obtained by our faith in His Son, Jesus Christ.
  - a. [“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” 2 Corinthians 5:21](#)
  - b. [“For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’” Romans 1:17](#)

### **Righteousness = Faith in Forgiveness for Our Unrighteousness**

God gave us all that we need to attain righteousness: faith. [“God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.” Romans 12:3](#) But what’s more, when we use our God-given faith to believe in His Son, Jesus Christ, it opens the door not only salvation and eternal life, but also the righteousness of God. As such, faith in God has transformational power, and operates within the spiritual realm.

- [“Abraham ‘believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” Galatians 3:6](#)
- [“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” Ephesians 2:8-99](#)
- [“Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.” Romans 3:27-28](#)

It is our faith in Jesus Christ—in what He did for us on the cross by dying for our sins—that provides us with the means to fulfill our hunger and thirst for righteousness. In addition, each time we are unrighteous—because of our faith—we are able to ask for and receive forgiveness. It is God’s grace and His love that creates a loathing and repugnance towards our unrighteousness; and a greater desire to seek and please Him, and not ourselves—and as we yield to the guidance of the Holy Spirit for the glory of God.

Paul (a Law-compliant Pharisee who persecuted Christians—who was chosen by the resurrected Jesus to proclaim His gospel to the Gentiles) declared the true source and means of obtaining righteousness. “But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and 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; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.” Philippians 3:7-11

“But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” Romans 3:21-26

### **Spiritual Righteousness**

Righteousness—from a spiritual perspective—glorifies God. Jesus demonstrated spiritual righteousness because He obediently pointed to God and glorified Him in every word, action and miracle. As such, the desires of Christians who hunger and thirst for His righteousness will seek to:

- Become less like themselves, and more like Jesus.
- Determine what is acceptable to the Lord.
- Evaluate their motivations and deeds to determine if they are based upon glorifying of God.
- Allow the light of Jesus to illuminate and dispel darkness via what we say and do.

Jesus declared, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.” John 8:12

“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord.” Ephesians 5:8-10

### **Two Additional Aspects of Righteousness: Justification and Sanctification**

#### Justification

We will never attain the degree of righteousness God desires in us, and we will never be perfect. “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” Isaiah 53:6

Jesus Christ was the only person who lived and did not sin—which made Him the perfect sacrifice for our sins. We were redeemed with, “The precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” 1 Peter 1:19

Jesus said (regarding Himself), “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” John 3:17

“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Romans 5:1

God declares we are righteous (sinless)—not by our works—but by our faith in the sacrificial death of Jesus when He took the punishment of our sins into His body on the cross. “Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness.” 1 Peter 2:24

Justified can be interpreted as “Just-as-if-I’d” did not sin. God’s forgiveness through our faith in Jesus is absolute. In fact, forgiven sin no longer exists. While similar, it is beyond what happens when we delete a file on our computer. Although we may delete a file and it is no longer accessible, it still resides on the hard drive and may be “resurrected” via special software tools. However, God not only deletes the file, He also permanently removes it from the “hard drive” so that it is not recoverable via any means. What’s more, God does this for His sake. His word declares:

- “I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins.” Isaiah 43:25
- “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.” Psalms 103:12
- “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin.” Romans 4:7-8

We are justified because of our faith in what Jesus did for us on the cross. Imagine what it will be like when we stand before God...and the discomfort we may experience as our memory reflects upon the sins we committed...and as we attempt to seek forgiveness...God responds, “Because of your faith, your sins do not exist!” “Through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life ... so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous.” Romans 5:18-19

### Sanctification

Sanctification is the process that transforms a “hungry and thirsty” Christian into the righteousness of God. It is the day-to-day life experiences (trials, tribulations, successes, failures, and lessons learned—combined with the influence and guidance of the Holy Spirit—that changes us from within and cleanses us from unrighteousness.

“But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.” Hebrews 10:12-14

“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He

might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.” Titus 2:11-14

“Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men. For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” Titus 3:1-7



“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.” Matthew 5:6

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:9

Can you identify at least one area of righteousness that you hunger and thirst after? If yes, which of the following is relevant and prudent:

- Take responsibility for the unrighteousness.
- Make a list of the:
  - Lies that are associated with the unrighteousness.
  - Triggers that initiate unrighteousness.
  - Different means, thoughts, or perceptions that are used to justify the unrighteousness.
  - Consequences of the unrighteousness, such as guilt, pain, shame, internal turmoil, and fear; harm to those we love; and separation from God.
- Recognize it is God’s love for us that He desires us to:
  - No longer be bound in slavery and held in darkness because of the unrighteousness.
  - Experience the peace and joy of His righteousness.
- Exercise your faith in Jesus Christ by:
  - Asking for forgiveness.
  - Requesting spiritual strength to overcome.
  - Obeying the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
- Read and internalize God’s word.
- Seek the assistance of a trusted accountability partner.
- Make a decision to actively avoid all “triggers” that initiate unrighteousness.
- Forgive those who have harmed you—as you have been forgiven—for your spiritual benefit.

All for His glory, for He alone is worthy!  
Harold D. Thomas