

Blessed Are the Hungry, Part 1

Luke 6:21

As we have done in the previous weeks, I want to start by looking at the text and read that opening section of the beatitudes and woes together, which is Luke 6:20-26. "Jesus lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said: 'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.

"'But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.'"

He ends in a sobering way to enter his sermon as he leaves us with those four woes. As we learned from verse 20, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God," as I said, that is the thesis verse for the whole section, and Jesus used poverty, as we said, he used it as a vivid metaphor for those who are the true citizens of the kingdom of God. Those who are poor have recognized their spiritual destitution before God, and they realize the world has nothing whatsoever to contribute to their standing before God. So, they come to God as a beggar. They come to God reaching out for divine mercy, for pity even.

God is pleased to respond, to hurry to their aid and to freely give. When God looks upon these poor, he doesn't give begrudgingly, he doesn't give sparingly. He just throws open the floodgates of heaven. The poverty of God's people is so fully consumed by divine grace that any impoverished condition is utterly forgotten in the magnificent splendor in the kingdom of God.

And that is exactly what we find as we consider the second beatitude, "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied." Just this huge reversal of fortune. As we enter in here, I just want to make a few grammatical observations before we get into our outline. It will really inform our outline. As you can see, verse 21, it contains two of those four beatitudes. And they're parallel with one another. The whole thing is structured in a parallel manner. They flow from the thesis verse in verse 20, so they're closely connected with the theme.

And notice there is an already/not-yet pattern in these verses. They describe what's already true, that is the present reality of possessing the kingdom but one that has yet to be consummated. In other words, those who are the poor, verse 20, whatever condition of poverty they seem to have at present, it's not actually the case because they are currently, right now already possessors of an earthly kingdom of God. Then you get into verse 21, and yet, as verse 21 shows us plainly, there are two present realities, hungering and weeping, which are actual. They are real, but they are only temporary, because one day they will be completely eclipsed by satisfaction and laughter.

And this is how we find ourselves today, beloved. If you're here today and you are a Christian, then you are currently right now in possession of the eternal kingdom of God. You may not have a good grasp on that all the time, but don't worry, it's not up to you. The king of that kingdom has a good grasp on you. He will never let you go. Your salvation is not up to you; it is up to him. And he will finish what he has started. That is the reality that we've been enabled by the grace of God to embrace by faith, the assurance of things we hope for, the conviction of things we do not yet see.

As a Christian, you yourself can attest to the present reality of your life, that there remains yet right now a hunger and a thirst. There is a longing. And we heard it in the Psalm we read earlier. "O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water," like the deserts of Judea where David was reflecting upon.

Or in the well-known opening of Psalm 42, "As the deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and

appear before God?" And that is the longing that Jesus describes in this beatitude, "Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied." But hungering and weeping, those metaphors, which by the way I should add are not always figures of speech, hungering and weeping are sometimes quite literal for believers during their sojourn on earth. But nevertheless, as metaphors, hunger and thirst, weeping and sorrow, they describe and they summarize the present experience of every believer. Our present discomfort makes us long for consolation from God, which is coming when Christ returns, bringing with him the kingdom.

He's already inaugurated the kingdom, the rule of God on earth. And through us, he exercises that rule in our hearts, in our lives, in our churches; but he's going to return to make that rule a physical, fully manifest reality here on earth. And we rejoice to see that day speed along, don't we? Let me show you, though, in the grammar, just briefly. Notice in verse 21 where Jesus says, "Blessed are you who are hungry now," and "Blessed are you who weep now."

You, you can't see this so much in the English, but in the Greek text, those two descriptions are participles, that is,

they are verbal nouns. They have a verbal element to them. It's those who are hungering, those who are weeping. This refers to a class of people. This refers to a certain group of people. They're the same people Jesus identifies as the poor, those who are already in possession of God's kingdom. So that's the group we're talking about.

Second, the participles, those who are hungering and those who are weeping, those are in the present tense. And that means that hungering and weeping is an ongoing condition. This is a continual reality for these people, so they are continually hungering, continually weeping. And for the present time, as Christians, we understand this. There is no lasting relief here in this life. That is to say that our consolation is not yet, not yet. However, there is a third observation we can make here. Jesus gives us confident hope for a change in that reality, and it's a certain hope.

Notice that little three-letter temporal adverb, all you know what I'm talking about, right? Now. It's the word, now. Write that down in your notes, three-letter temporal adverb, and you will impress your friends at dinner parties. They'll say,

Wow, so you really paid attention in junior high grammar! The word, now. "Blessed are you who are hungry now." "Blessed are you who weep now." Jesus is using there a temporal adverb, now, to signal the fact that hungering and weeping is only temporary. And lest we wonder, he immediately follows the, now, situation with future tense verbs, "You shall be satisfied," "You shall laugh." In other words, wait patiently, change is coming soon.

Not only does Jesus give us a hope that is a confident hope, but the fourth observation here out of the grammar, he gives us an abundant hope because the current condition of hunger is going to be consummated by full satisfaction. The current condition of weeping is going to be consummated by laughter. Such a profound and lasting change of our present circumstances! And that is a reminder of Messianic restoration promises, all of which are lavish and all of which are overwhelmingly rich. All will be fulfilled when the kingdom arrives in all its fullness, all its splendor, and all its glory.

Notice, fifthly, observations just here outta what's written there in the grammar. Notice the passive voice in that

beatitude promise, "You shall be satisfied." You shall be satisfied. Who is the one who will provide our satisfaction? We might identify that as a divine passive. We're not the ones who are earning or gaining our own satisfaction; we're the ones who are just recipients of satisfaction. It is God who is the hidden actor in that verb. He is not named, but he is there. He is the one who satisfies us, right? And that seals it. If the eternal God is the one behind this promise, then we can embrace what Jesus says here with full confidence and know that God himself will provide abundant satisfaction to all of us who are dissatisfied now.

So what we're going to do is combine these several observations into two points for our outline. Just two outline points, very simple, nothing fancy. We're going to identify our hunger first. Then, we're going to find out how we're going to satisfy it. Here's our first point: Identify in yourself the pangs of hunger. Identify in yourself the pangs of hunger. Jesus is using the concept of physical hunger, the desire to satisfy physical hunger pangs, to identify the deepest longings of the human spirit, which only God can satisfy.

And before we talk about that, we want to look here first at Jesus' imagery here, which are the source of his metaphor. We need to understand the literal sense of the hunger he identifies. The word Jesus uses here in the text translated, "you who are hungry," it comes from the verb *peinaó* or *peinaó*. And sometimes it refers many times in the New Testament to literal physical hunger, sometimes quite severe hunger. For example, when Jesus was tested for forty days in the desert, he ate nothing during those days. And Luke tells us, Luke 4:2, that "When [those days] were ended, he was hungry." This is the word right here, *peinaó*, verb.

The disciples walking through some grain fields on a Sabbath day, verse 1 of this chapter, chapter 6, they were hungry, and they picked heads of grain, rubbed them together in their hands and ate. And when Jesus defended their actions to the critical scribes and Pharisees, remember he appealed to David's actions when David fled from Saul. David and his men were on the run, they were, they were low-provisioned, and he needed to feed his men and in Luke 6:3, Jesus said, "He was hungry." This is the same verb, *peinaó*.

The Apostle Paul used the same word to describe his shabby treatment as an apostle. He wasn't putting on the Ritz. He was, 1 Corinthians 4:11, "to the present hour we hunger," *peinaó*, "we thirst, we're poorly dressed and we're buffeted and homeless." It's a word that is usually cast like that in, in difficult and desperate circumstances. Now I believe this concept of hunger is deep, gnawing, sharp-pained hunger in the gut, feelings of weakness then that accompany that condition, even feelings of desperation that arise out of the soul out of hunger and crying out in anxiety, I must have food or I will die.

Listen, I believe that is the kind of hunger that very few of us in America ever experienced in our lifetimes. Ask some of the senior, really senior saints. Some of them, perhaps, who've been children of the Great Depression. They might be able to describe that feeling to you or they might know those who knew that feeling and had it described to them. Ask those who have found themselves in desperate situations while maybe in foreign lands, while on military campaigns, and they might be able to tell you about that feeling of desperation as well.

For Jesus, though, speaking to the crowd who had gathered before him, they all knew this feeling of hunger from way down south in Jerusalem, all the way up north in Tyre and Sidon. Most of these people before him, if not all of them, they had experienced hunger like this. Or if they hadn't personally felt it, they at least knew many people who had, and not only that, but severe hunger, deprivation, even starvation, those were realities that lived on in their social, cultural memory because they were woven into the fabric of their history.

In recent memory of people who lived in Palestine, that whole region, they knew the campaigns and the sieges by the Greek and Roman armies, and that meant deprivation, sometimes very severe deprivation such that it was common for famine to ensue. And then more lives were lost from the famine conditions resulting from war than those who had actually died on the battlefields. That would be illustrated once again in AD 70 when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem. More than a million people died, and most of them died by starvation.

When you go back into the Old Testament, you find this Greek word *peinaó*, Jesus uses, it's used in the, in the

Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament. The Septuagint uses *peinaō* to translate two different Hebrew words. The first is, *rā'ēb*, which mostly means, famine, or it could refer to the conditions of famine or resulting from famine. You read in Genesis 41:55, as a result of the famine that Joseph prophesied in Egypt, it says, that "all the land of Egypt was famished," that's the word, *rā'ēb*. And "the people cried to Pharaoh for bread."

Such desperate conditions in the ancient world meant that Pharaoh might have been very nervous about revolt, except that God had sent Joseph to Egypt to spare the land and to spare his brothers and to sustain the twelve tribes of Israel. But famine means severe, maddening hunger which drives people to do desperate things, and that's why governments and kingdoms are concerned to make sure the citizens are reasonably provided for because desperate people do desperate things like execute ineffective rulers.

So, listen, after forty days without food, roaming the desert, Jesus felt that kind of gut-piercing, soul-splitting hunger, and we cannot understand the severity of pain and

weakness that he endured while going through that period of testing and trial in the wilderness. I mean, the physical thing is, is one issue, but the spiritual suffering and agony he went through is completely another and add to that the testing provided by the temptations of Satan. We've never been there. Rather than commit acts of heinous sin in his condition of physical depletion and desperation, Jesus maintained perfect righteousness.

There's another Hebrew word, not just the word, *rā'ēb*, which is referring to a famine, but another Hebrew word that describes the feeling of desperation and exhaustion that comes from being hungry and thirsty is the word, *ayeph*. *ayeph*. The Septuagint uses the word *peinaó* to translate that word, as well. You can almost hear the sound of exhaustion in that Hebrew word *ayeph*, like panting or grasping for breath. This is the kind of physical exhaustion that weary travelers could feel in that time at journey's end after they have walked dozens of miles, hundreds of miles, even, sometimes through scorching desert heat.

The provisions were depleted at the end of the journey. No more water. They were just longing for satisfaction of their physical cravings. Some of those who were listening to Jesus that day on the Sermon on the Mount no doubt felt that way when they entered Capernaum. Maybe not as desperate, but after traveling great distances, they also needed food and water to restore their strength.

Again, there are many references I could point you to, but let's, let's just look at one of them and go to Psalm 107, Psalm 107. This is one of my favorite psalms. I absolutely love Psalm 107. The psalmist here paints vivid pictures in different kinds of, of need, people who look up to God. In that first section, the psalmist paints a vivid picture of God's steadfast love to restore the weary traveler. This is someone who has, who has been wandering in the desert because he's lost and he's desperate.

Look at the first part of this, starting in verse 1. "Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love ensures forever! Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he

has redeemed from trouble and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.”

You know who that is describing? That’s us. That’s us Gentiles are included in that number. “Some,” verse 4, “wandered in desert wastes, finding no way to a city to dwell in; hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. He led them by a straight way until they reached a city to dwell in. Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man! For he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things.”

It’s not until you reach that point of utter desperation that you cry to the Lord for help, for relief, and God is pleased to visit you with his mercy and his grace. He takes our little lost hands in his big guiding hand, and he leads us out by a straight way into a city of plenty where we are restored, our longing souls are satisfied, our hunger is relieved. He fills us with good things. Listen, that’s what this word *peinao* pictures, especially when you read the fuller version, Matthew

5:6, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst." It's a condition of physical depletion, desperation that few of us know, but many throughout human history have experienced.

So when Jesus used this word *peinaó*, it created a very vivid image in their mind, resonated powerfully with them. Again, Jesus is not, here though, they would have known this, we've seen this, he's not talking merely about physical hunger and thirst here. It is a metaphor. Jesus is talking about a spiritual hunger and thirst, and one that can only be satisfied in God. It's not satisfied in this life. It's not satisfied by people. It's not satisfied by a marriage. It's not satisfied by having children. It's not satisfied by having grandchildren. It's not satisfied by any of the things this world has to offer, no sights, no views, no vacations, no, no pleasures. As good as all those things are, as wholesome as all those things can be, they do not satisfy the soul.

How do I know that Jesus is using this as a metaphor? Because that is the clear context of these beatitudes, along with those corresponding four woes. That is what we learned in our study of "Blessed are the poor," over the last few weeks,

poverty, destitution. This provides the perfect picture of Jesus' true disciples. They find no hope in this world, they have no self-reliance, no reliance on riches or wealth; they simply extend the hands of a beggar, empty and open wide, looking upward to God in faith.

And as I said, God is pleased to give them not only what they're asking for then, but the entire kingdom of God. It's that spiritual sense pictured in first in the metaphor of poverty that leads us into verse 21. The hunger, the thirst, the weeping, the mourning, all will be forgotten when the kingdom of God arrives in its fullness.

By contrast, those in verse 25 who are full now, those who are laughing now, when the kingdom of God comes, they'll be judged. They will be going eternally hungry. They will be suffering eternal sorrow and there will be no relief. I think last week we talked about the rich man and Lazarus, Luke 16. The rich man filled in this life, while Lazarus begging at his gate; when the end came, their roles were reversed, fortunes reversed, and the rich man suffered in torment while Lazarus was at Abraham's bosom, fully satisfied.

Whether it's Matthew's version, Matthew 5:6, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness," or Luke's simpler more direct version, "Blessed are those who are hungry," Jesus made both statements, by the way, it's a picture of the same spiritual reality. Hunger and thirst here are metaphors for intense longing, intense craving. One commentator put it this way, "Jesus could easily have described his disciples as those who want to be obedient or desire holiness, but such language simply wasn't powerful enough, I would say, to grab our attention. It's not powerful enough. The true disciple hungers and thirsts for righteousness and he longs to live a godly life as much as a starving man longs for his next piece of bread, or a parched tongue yearns for a drop of water." End quote

Among the true disciples of Jesus Christ, there is within us this gnawing sense of dissatisfaction, this discontent with anything this world has to offer. And there is, as we feel it, this pervasive and abiding need to be satisfied, fully satisfied, fully contented, and it's yet unrealized. But we long to be filled, right? We long to be filled. And if you feel that, blessed are you. Blessed are you, for you shall be satisfied.

PILLAR OF
—TRUTH— 

When the kingdom of God arrives in power, all hunger will come to an end for God's people, because they will be satisfied.