The Constitution of the Kingdom

A 33-Session Journey through the Sermon on the Mount & the Sermon on the Plain

SESSION FIVE — Blessed Are Those Who Hunger

Part One: The Blessings of the Kingdom · Texts: Matthew 5:6; Luke 6:21a, 25a

The Texts

> **Matthew 5:6** *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.*
>
> **Luke 6:21a** *Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.*
>
> **Luke 6:25a** *Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry.*

The Beatitude with an Empty Stomach

Jesus reaches now for the most primal thing in us. Not a preference. Not a wish. Hunger. Real hunger — not "I could go for a snack," but the deep, gnawing, single-minded ache of a body that has gone without. The kind of hunger that takes over, that you cannot think around, that will not be reasoned with or distracted or told to wait. Thirst in a dry land. The whole self, bent toward the one thing it must have.

And that — Jesus says — is what a Kingdom person looks like.

Not someone who has arrived. Not someone who has it all together, all figured out, all cleaned up. Someone who is starving. Blessed, he says, are the hungry. What if the mark of a citizen of the Kingdom is not that they are full, but that they cannot stop aching for something they do not yet have?

Let's search the Scriptures together.

Two Words for the Same Ache

Here again is the gift of reading the mountain and the plain together. Matthew gives us the fuller phrase: "those who hunger and thirst for righteousness."[1] Luke strips it to the bone, the way he always does: "you who are hungry now" — and then adds the edge — "woe to you who are full now."

And just as with the poor, back in our second session, we must not let one silence the other. Luke keeps it in the belly, and he is right to: the God of the Bible cares about empty stomachs.

[1]Unless noted, Scripture is quoted from the New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition (NRSVue), the base translation for this course.

This is the God of manna in the wilderness, of prophets thundering against those who feast while the poor go hungry, of a Messiah who fed thousands on a hillside because he had compassion and would not send them away empty. Real hunger matters to God.[2]

And Matthew is right too: there is a hunger deeper even than the body's — a hunger of the whole self for something the body alone cannot fill. Read together, they hold the whole truth: the Kingdom is good news to the literally hungry and blessed are those whose souls are starving for something more.

What Is "Righteousness"?

But we must stop on that word, "righteousness," because most of us have been handed the wrong meaning for it, and everything turns on getting it right.

When we hear "righteousness," we tend to picture personal piety — being clean, being good, keeping the rules, keeping a tidy private morality. And that is not what the word means. The Greek is *dikaiosynē*, and behind it stands one of the great words of the Hebrew Scriptures — *tsedeqah*, paired always with *mishpat*, justice. Righteousness in the Bible is not mainly about being personally spotless. It is about things being set right. Right relationships. A right world. Justice — especially for the poor, the widow, the orphan, the stranger, the ones the world wrongs.[3]

So hear what Jesus actually blesses. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst — not for their own moral scorecard, but for justice. For the world put right. For God's will done on earth as it is in heaven. To hunger for righteousness is to be unable to eat, unable to rest, unable to look away, because the world is not yet as God means it to be — and you are starving for the day it will be.

A Hunger, Not an Arrival

Now catch the shape of the blessing, because it is pure grace. Jesus does not bless those who have righteousness. He does not bless the ones who have achieved justice, or arrived at goodness, or finished the work. He blesses the ones who hunger for it. The blessing is on the appetite, not the accomplishment.

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[2]Luke keeps the blessing in the body—"you who are hungry now"—and adds the woe to "you who are full now" (6:25a). God's concern for literal hunger runs through Scripture: manna in the wilderness, the prophets against those who feast while the poor starve, the feeding of the crowds, "give us this day our daily bread." On refusing to spiritualize away the material, see Gustavo Gutiérrez and Clarence Jordan.

[3]The Greek dikaiosynē ("righteousness") carries the full weight of the Hebrew tsedeqah, paired always with mishpat, justice: not private moral spotlessness but right relationship and a world set right, especially for the vulnerable. To hunger for righteousness is to hunger for justice. See Glen Stassen and David Gushee, Kingdom Ethics; N.T. Wright; and Warren Carter, Matthew and the Margins.

Do you feel the mercy in that? You do not have to have arrived. You do not have to be the finished article. You only have to still be hungry — to have refused to make your peace with a world gone wrong, to have kept your appetite for something better alive. That is all the Kingdom asks of you at this table: not that you are full of righteousness, but that you are starving for it.

And that is exactly why Luke's woe stings where it does. "Woe to you who are full now." The danger is not being empty; the danger is being so comfortably full that you have lost your appetite — so at ease, so well-fed, so settled into things as they are, that the world's injustice no longer gnaws at you at all. The full have stopped hungering. And a Kingdom person who has stopped hungering for the world to be set right has, quietly, stopped being a Kingdom person.[4]

"They Will Be Filled"

And then — the promise. "They will be filled." Once again the grammar hides God as the one who acts: God will fill them. God will satisfy this hunger. It will not ache forever. The whole Bible strains toward a feast — the great banquet on the mountain where God wipes away every tear, the table where the last are seated first, the marriage supper at the end of all things — and at that table, Jesus promises, the ones who starved for justice will finally eat their fill.[5]

That is the not-yet. But hear the now: the One saying this is himself the bread of life. He fed crowds with loaves in his own hands. He taught us to pray for daily bread — and then to become the answer to that prayer for one another. So the feast is coming, yes. And the first courses are already being served — every time the hungry are actually fed, every time a corner of the world is set right, the banquet leans in and the Kingdom shows its face.

Freedom for Others

Put it to our thread, and watch how naturally it fits. To hunger for righteousness is, by its very nature, a hunger for others — for the wronged to be vindicated, for the hungry to be fed, for someone else's world to be set right. You cannot hunger for justice selfishly; the appetite points outward, or it is not justice at all. So ask with me: whose hunger — the literal ache of an empty stomach, and the deeper ache for a fair shake — am I willing to feel, and to help fill? And what fullness of my own — what comfort, what satiety, what quiet peace I have made with the

[4]The blessing falls on the hunger, not the achievement—on holy dissatisfaction, not arrival. Luke's woe warns the sated who have lost their appetite for a world set right, echoing the woe to the rich (6:24) and to the laughing (6:25b): the comfortable, anesthetized full.

[5]"They will be filled" is a divine passive (God will satisfy) pointing to the Kingdom banquet (Isaiah 25:6; Luke 14; Revelation 19)—already begun in Jesus, the bread of life (John 6), who fed the crowds and taught us to become the answer to the prayer for daily bread. On this inaugurated "already/not-yet," see N.T. Wright and George Eldon Ladd.

way things are — might I need to lay down to get my appetite back? *Freedom for others may cost us our comfortable fullness — what can we lay down?*

Around the Table — For Discussion

- Jesus blesses hunger, not fullness. When have you felt that kind of hunger — for God, for justice, for a world set right? When have you felt full and settled instead?
- "Righteousness" in the Bible means justice — the world put right — not just private goodness. How does that change what this blessing is asking of you?
- Luke keeps it in the belly: "you who are hungry now." Where is literal hunger in our corridor — and what would it mean to take it as seriously as God does?
- The woe falls on "those who are full now." Where have you grown so comfortable that an injustice stopped bothering you? What might reawaken the appetite?
- Freedom for others may cost us something. Whose hunger are you being invited to help fill — and what fullness of yours stands in the way?

This Week — A Practice

Two movements. First, do something about actual hunger. Feed someone — through the pantry, a meal shared, a hand extended to an empty table in our corridor. Let this beatitude leave the page and land in someone's stomach. Second, reawaken your appetite for justice: name one wrong you have quietly made peace with — one place the world is not as God means it to be — and let yourself be hungry about it again. Pray it. Sit in the ache instead of numbing it. Then bring back what you found. This Kingdom, like all the rest, is learned in the doing.

Looking Ahead

Next session, the blessing turns outward toward one another: "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy." Luke says it as a command — "be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." We'll ask what mercy actually costs, and why the Kingdom ties the mercy we receive so tightly to the mercy we give.

Benediction

So go this week and stay hungry. Refuse to be the full one who has stopped caring. Let the ache for a world set right keep you awake, keep you tender, keep you reaching — and trust the promise that this hunger, unlike every other, will not be disappointed. The God who set the table has not forgotten the starving. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness — for they, and not the comfortably full, will be filled.

Love, practiced — not just professed — reveals the Kingdom among us.

Blessings,

Pastor Mick Finch

SESSION FIVE

Introduction Video Script

Single presenter, to camera · target 5–6 minutes · warm, steady, unhurried

[Begin still.]

Welcome back to the table. Today Jesus reaches for the most primal thing in us. Not a preference, not a wish — hunger. Real hunger. Not "I could go for a snack," but the deep, gnawing ache of a body that's gone without — the kind of hunger that takes over, that you can't think around, that won't be reasoned with. Thirst in a dry land. The whole self bent toward the one thing it has to have.

And that, Jesus says, is what a Kingdom person looks like. Not someone who's arrived. Not someone who has it all figured out and cleaned up. Someone who's starving. What if the mark of a citizen of the Kingdom isn't that they're full — but that they can't stop aching for something they don't yet have?

Here again we get to read the mountain and the plain together. Matthew gives us the fuller phrase: "those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." Luke strips it to the bone: "you who are hungry now" — and then the edge — "woe to you who are full now." And just like with the poor, we don't let one silence the other. Luke keeps it in the belly — and he's right to, because the God of the Bible cares about empty stomachs. This is the God of manna, of prophets who thundered against people feasting while the poor starved, of a Messiah who fed thousands on a hillside because he had compassion. Real hunger matters to God.

[Slow down — the key word.]

But we have to stop on that word, "righteousness," because most of us have been handed the wrong meaning, and everything turns on getting it right. When we hear "righteousness" we picture personal piety — being clean, being good, keeping the rules. That's not what the word means. Behind it stands one of the great words of the Hebrew Scriptures — tsedeqah, paired always with mishpat, justice. Righteousness in the Bible isn't mainly about being personally spotless. It's about things being set right. Right relationships. A right world. Justice — especially for the poor, the widow, the stranger, the ones the world wrongs.

So hear what Jesus actually blesses: blessed are those who hunger and thirst — not for their own tidy scorecard, but for justice. For the world put right. For God's will done on earth as in heaven. To hunger for righteousness is to be unable to look away, because the world isn't yet what God means it to be — and you're starving for the day it will be.

[Warmer — the grace.]

Now catch the shape of it, because it's pure grace. Jesus doesn't bless the ones who have righteousness. He doesn't bless the ones who've arrived, or finished the work. He blesses the

ones who hunger for it. The blessing is on the appetite, not the accomplishment. You don't have to be the finished article. You only have to still be hungry — to have refused to make your peace with a world gone wrong.

And that's exactly why Luke's woe stings where it does. "Woe to you who are full now." The danger isn't being empty — it's being so comfortably full that you've lost your appetite. So well-fed and settled that the world's injustice doesn't gnaw at you anymore. A Kingdom person who's stopped hungering for the world to be set right has quietly stopped being a Kingdom person.

And then the promise: "they will be filled." God will fill them. This hunger will not ache forever. The whole Bible strains toward a feast — the great banquet where God wipes away every tear and the last are seated first. And the One promising it is himself the bread of life, who fed the crowds with loaves in his hands, who taught us to pray for daily bread and then become the answer to that prayer for each other. The feast is coming — and the first courses are already being served, every time the hungry are fed and a corner of the world is set right.

[The thread and the practice.]

So here's our question this week — freedom for others: whose hunger, the empty stomach and the ache for a fair shake, am I willing to feel and to help fill? And what fullness of my own — what comfort, what peace I've made with the way things are — might I need to lay down to get my appetite back?

And here's the practice — two things. First, do something about actual hunger this week. Feed someone. Let this beatitude leave the page and land in a stomach. Second, reawaken your appetite for justice: name one wrong you've quietly made peace with, and let yourself be hungry about it again. Pray it. Sit in the ache instead of numbing it.

Next time, the blessing turns toward one another — "Blessed are the merciful." We'll ask what mercy really costs, and why Jesus ties the mercy we receive so tightly to the mercy we give.

[Slow. Land it.]

For now, go and stay hungry. Refuse to be the full one who's stopped caring. Let the ache for a world set right keep you awake, keep you tender, keep you reaching — and trust the promise that this hunger, unlike every other, will not be disappointed. The God who set the table has not forgotten the starving.

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Blessings, Pastor Mick Finch.