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Presentation Transcript
Hungering for Righteousness
September 23, 2010

We're doing a series on *The Beatitudes*. We're on our fifth one – the fourth beatitude, which is *Hungering for Righteousness*.

Here's what we've covered so far in this series. We learned that the beatitudes are the keys to spiritual success with God. It's also interesting to notice that Jesus did not approach spiritual success by starting out with the law. He started out with these attitudes and emotions, actually.

We learned, second of all, that the beatitudes are progressive – each one is the foundation for the next one and is the outgrowth of the previous one. So they begin with our attitudes about ourselves and relationship to God being poor in spirit. And then this awareness creates an emotion of mourning in us, as we realize how our lack of right relationship with God has caused so much trouble for us and others and God, as well. That mourning causes us to walk softly and gently, rather than demandingly or high handedly. And we become meek. That's the third one.

We learned that the first three can be correlated to a corresponding holy day. Poverty of spirit leads us to realize our need for Passover, which is Christ's sacrifice. Mourning relates to our ineffective efforts to root the leaven or sin out of our lives on our own. That would be the Days of Unleavened Bread. And meekness and gentleness is the quality needed for success in the church, as granted by the Holy Spirit, which connects strongly to Pentecost.

...the skills we need to be effective in the church and what God has given us, which is the fourth one in the seven step plan.

What the words mean: *Blessed are...* "Happy and blessed are you when..." ...*hunger and thirst for...* Two of the primary cravings of human beings, right? Food and water. We have to have those things. So when righteousness becomes as important to us as food and water, then we're on the right track. The word *righteousness* – that word – means *to be compliant to all the standards and commands of God*. That's what it means. *Filled* – just

means to no longer be hunger or thirsty. So the craving will be satisfied, if we crave righteousness now in this life – if we crave to comply with *all* the standards of God.

So what is that attitude? Let's talk more about that. Let's start with a really good, foundational scripture to show what righteousness is. David said:

Psa. 119:172 – *My tongue shall speak your word, for all your commandments are righteousness.* So that goes right back to the definition that we got out of the New Testament commentary – actually, it was Louw & Nida Lexicon – for what that word *righteousness* means – that Jesus used. So David is saying the same thing. *All your commandments are righteousness.* Not all but one, or all but two, but *all* of them.

So this beatitude is about obeying the law of God. Now I said earlier that Jesus didn't start with the law. He didn't. He actually put it right in the middle, so it becomes *central*, doesn't it? It's hard to lop off from either the beginning or the backside, isn't it? So obedience to God really is the central theme of the beatitudes, but He's talking about it in a way that is different from the way many people think about it.

Let's read Matthew 5:17. Matthew 5 – wow! This is in the same chapter that the beatitudes are in. Right? He says – here's a warning for us, because He knew that some people would think this. He says, "Don't think it!"

Mt. 5:17 – *Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth: Until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, nor the least stroke of the pen will by any means disappear from the law, until everything is accomplished.*

So there it is. We're supposed to be law-abiding people – *God's* laws.

Now let's look at hungering and thirsting. Psalm 42:1 is a good place to look at that, I think..

Psa. 42:1 – *As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My souls thirsts for God – for the living God – when I can go and meet with God.*

David said that he *hungered* and *thirsted* to be like God, and to see God, and to be in relationship with Him.

About our attitude toward the law of God, we can look at Psalm 119, and verse 1.

Psa. 119:1 – *Blessed are the undefiled in the way* – what does that mean? – *who walk in the law of the LORD.* Blessed are they who walk in the law of the Lord – who are undefiled and living that way of life. It *is* a way of life, isn't it? It's called *The Way* in the New Testament, too.

V-10 – *With my whole heart I have sought you. O let not me wander from your commandments.*

I encountered a man once, who had been a member of the Church of God for many years. And he had become embittered toward the church that he was attending. And his bitterness took the form of regretting all the money he had given to it. He told me that if he had it all back, he could have had a home free and clear by this time of his life. So I guess he gave quite a bit of money. I thought of the question that Peter asked Ananias. “Wasn’t it your money to either give or keep? Nobody made you give it.” That’s what Peter said. If he asked that question, can’t we? We surely can, can’t we? So, at the time he gave that money, he made a big deal out of giving it to *God* – that’s what he told everybody – but now he thought he had just given it to *men*. But mostly, he was just wishing that he had it back, so that he could spend it on something *he* wanted. That’s wandering. That’s going *off track*. He was on the right track to begin with. It says many, many places in the Bible that when we tithe, we give offerings, we *will be blessed* and that we should *do* those things. Those are some of the many commandments that God gives us. So this guy had wandered. He left that straight and narrow path. What’s that song say? *Bring my wandering heart to thee*. That’s what happens to us.

So, if we want to be successful with God, we have to continue to hunger and thirst for the law of God, and not go off track. I suppose the thought of having a house paid for – free and clear – could kind of be like filling yourself up on junk food. Some people would say, “Well, that’s nothing to make fun of.” Well, compared to being in the Kingdom of God, owning a house isn’t that big a deal.

Okay. So that’s a little bit on the attitude and what it means to hunger and thirst for righteousness – to long to be like God.

So how does that connect to the previous attitude – to that of meekness? Do we remember where David’s thirst for God’s law came from? I’m going to read you the exact moment when that attitude came to be his. It’s in 2 Samuel 12.

2 Sam. 12:1 – *The LORD sent Nathan to David. Nathan was a prophet. When he came to him, he said, “There were two men in a certain town – one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb that he bought. He raised it and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup, and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him. So David knew all about how cute lambs could be, didn’t he, because he had been a shepherd when he was a boy. Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler, who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come. See, back then, you had to be hospitable to people. You killed the fatted lamb, right? That’s what they talked about. So it says, When David heard this story that Nathan told him, he burned with anger against the man, and said to Nathan, “As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die! He must pay for the lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no*

pity.” Then Nathan said to David, “You are this man. This is what the LORD God of Israel says, ‘I anointed you king over Israel. I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave you your master’s house to you, your master’s wives into your arms. I gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if this had been too little, I would have given you even more! So why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in His eyes. You struck down Uriah, the Hittite, with a sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonite.

That’s when he got it! That’s when he started to become meek and a man after God’s own heart. He killed a man so he could take his wife. He got the woman pregnant. She had a baby. The baby got sick. David fasted for seven days, laying on the palace floor seven days and seven nights. He begged God for the life of the baby. And while he was down there on his belly praying, he knew that everybody in the kingdom knew what he had done – that he had disgraced his office, that people had suffered and died, because of his selfishness. Can we feel it? Can we feel what that would be like? He felt unfit to live – like a complete fool. He could not even lift up his head. And rather than trying to paint it over, cover it up, distract himself with the affairs of state, bury it, repress it, push it away, he became poor in spirit. And he realized that it was going to be a never-ending string of things like this, unless he admitted that he was a total failure in spirituality without God’s help. And he mourned his weakness and the trouble he caused, especially after the baby died. And he became meek and teachable after that. And he began to hunger and thirst to obey God’s law.

So there it is. There’s the progression of how all four of these fit together. Once we admit we know nothing about the things of God – which is poverty of spirit – that we are doomed to failure in that realm – once we mourn all of our violations, as he did, we become meek and gentle with others, knowing that we’re no better than they are. If we point the finger at somebody else, we’re also pointing three back at us. And then we strongly desire to align with God’s standards and become Godly people that we know we should be – which is the fourth beatitude – to hunger and thirst for righteousness. So that’s how it came to David. He was brought face to face with his own spiritual failure – his own weakness.

Let’s talk about what it means to obey the commands of God. What kind of craving is this? This is really important for us. In Luke 18:12 there was a Pharisee, who said:

Lk. 18:12 – *I fast twice a week and give tithes of all I possess.* “God, I’m so thankful that I’m not like all these other people – these other sinners.” Is that what He wants us to be like?

In Matthew 5:20, Jesus said:

Mt. 5:20 – *Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.*

So that Pharisee was talking about doing some things that were good – giving tithes, fasting. But Jesus said there has to be more to it than that. It has to go beyond just keeping the outward manifestations – the rules that we can see observed. The rules all point to an attitude. That’s what He’s always talking about. It’s about the attitude that He’s trying to get us to, not the things that we do to get there.

Let’s go Romans 13, verse 8. Here’s Paul explaining it from his perspective – and God’s, as well.

Rom. 13:8 – *Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another.* Why is there continuing debt to love one another? Because He loved us and forgave us of our sins, and we’re no better than anybody else. *For he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.* All those rules are to point us toward our attitude toward other people. *The commandments – do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not covet, and whatever other commandment there may be – are summed up in this one rule: love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law.*

So the law goes to loving God first. That’s what poverty of spirit is all about. Right? And then it starts going outward to love of others. So that foundation of love for others flows out of a love for God. Do we understand that? How important that is? Love for others flows out of a love for God. If we have a love problem with people, we need to backtrack. There’s a reason why that is happening. So that’s what the beatitudes teach us.

When we know that the desire for righteousness is built on a foundation of meekness, and before that mourning, and before that poverty of spirit, if we’re having problems getting excited about following God, or staying engaged, or staying on that straight and narrow path, and having trouble being wholehearted, then our solution is to go *back* – back to our conversion and rebuild from the beginning – step by step, knowing that there is a foundation under each one of those points till we get back to the first one. And unless the foundation is *strong*, there’s going to be trouble.

I remember years ago – the decade when Mark McGuire and Sammy Sosa and Barry Bonds were hitting all those home runs – Bonds went into a slump the year that he was hitting for the record. And the first thing he did was go to his batting coach. He went right back to the fundamentals of how to swing a bat. He rebuilt his swing from the ground up, starting with the footwork and all the way up. The point of the beatitudes is to know where the beginning is and the steps of growth we can take to rebuild from the ground up. That’s why it is so important to understand this.

One of the byproducts of meekness is to realize that we’re no better than other people. And by implication, then, we all need God’s righteousness, don’t we?

Okay, so that’s a platitude. How does that fit into the real world? Well, I was talking to a young woman recently – that was a client of mine – and she was working through some things her parents did to her as she grew up that were hurtful to her. At first, of course,

she was angry. Then she got down to how much it hurt her. She got in touch with the pain of it. But the more we worked on it, the less angry she became, because the more she worked on it, the more she realized that they were only doing to her what had been done to them. She came to see that if she didn't do anything about this, she would do the same thing to her children, too. Now she also realized that her parents didn't mean to do this to her. They loved her. But because of how they were brought up, they were just following along and parenting in the same way.

So she made the comment, "This is sort of an inherited behavior passed down in my family." And she said, "We're all a part of it." So she realized that she was going to follow the same pattern, if she didn't do something differently, and she was no better than her parents, and would be no better of a parent than her parents were to her. So what she was trying to do was break that chain. And she was going back to the beginning and reworking it all. It's kind of a metaphor for spiritual growth, isn't it, when you understand that it happens in phases to us. And we have to go back to the beginning sometimes to solve the problems we have in the present. We have to go back to *feel* how it felt about ourself – or how we feel about ourself – in relationship to God.

"God and I are buddies." That's how Job started out. Right? That's how he thought. "Me and God – you know, together we can do anything." But then he found out that that isn't really how it is. It's "God's way up here and I'm way down here. God loves me, but I'm not equal to Him – not in anything. I am a total absence of all Godly qualities, except that He helps me."

Okay, so that's a little bit about the attitude. How does it relate to the salvation plan? This is just so easy, isn't it? Trumpets. The fourth beatitude needs to connect to the fourth holy day. Does it? Well, what is it that we all lack? We lack the righteousness of God, don't we? That's what we lack. We're to hunger for it. And who is it that has that for us? It's Jesus Christ, isn't it? And who is it that is going to bring it down here and give it to us? It's just so obvious.

The Feast of Trumpets pictures the return of Jesus Christ to the earth. He returns on the seventh trumpet in Revelation. Let's read some of the things that the Bible says about Him and His return. Let's go to Malachi 4:4. You realize, when you read this, that Malachi 4 is just a scant five chapters away from the chapter on the beatitudes. Malachi 4 is the last chapter in the Old Testament.

Mal. 4:1 – *Surely the day is coming. It will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evil doer will be stubble. We don't know what stubble is anymore, but if you've ever farmed wheat, after the harvest, there's stubble. And stubble is dry. If it's allowed to burn, it just goes whoooo through everything. 'The day is coming that will set them on fire,' says the LORD Almighty. Not a root or a branch will be left to them. But for you, who revere My name, the Sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. The Sun of righteousness. Righteousness is one of God's names.*

Let's explore the symbolism of that a little bit. Luke 1 – toward the end of the chapter, God is causing Zacharias to prophesy about his son John. And he says, in verse 76:

Lk. 1:76 – *You, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High, for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for Him, to give His people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising Sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death to guide our feet into the path of peace.*

So here's a prophecy, just before Jesus was born, that He would come like sun to bring light and peace by guiding us. He would drive away the darkness – the ignorance, the foolishness – and allow the light of righteousness to shine. So that's a very strong illusion to the coming of Jesus Christ and what He's going to bring with Him.

Did you know that every morning, when the sun comes up, we're supposed to think about the return of Christ and His righteousness? And that sun, when it comes up over the horizon and it begins to suddenly become light, that's how it's going to be. Light is symbolic for righteousness and the knowledge of God. Every day!

1 Pt. 2:9 – *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him, who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light.*

There it is again. So what does this mean? I mean, there it is. Right? When it talks about Christ coming back to the earth, most of the time it talks about the righteousness that He brings with Him. That's what is going to make everything better.

So what does it mean that these core spiritual attitudes connect so closely to the holy days? Well, I think that it means that to be a part of the plan of God, we have to, also, personally connect to the attitudes of God. I mean, these attitudes are all expressed in the holy days, as far I can see. And if we want to be there, we have to take on these attitudes and these emotions, too. We can't experience the Kingdom of God without the attitudes that go with it. That's why some people are going to be burned up like stubble, just like we read. So wouldn't that make the beatitudes something that we all ought to think about every day? Wouldn't it make it a life and death issue? A salvation issue? And shouldn't we be concerned about that as often as the sun comes up? I think so.

Let's talk a little bit about longing now. That's part of this beatitude, isn't it? At the end of the book of Revelation, after all the visions that John saw, he summed up his own personal experience with three words. He said, "Come, Lord Jesus." If you think about that, you can hear the longing and the hungering, can't you? He saw all this stuff, in vision, happening and when he got done with that, he *knew* that Jesus Christ *needed* to return.

I didn't realize what was going to happen to me when I started being trained to do EMDR, but it's pulled me toward doing more trauma work. A lot of the work that

counselors do...a friend of mine said, “We deal with the worried well.” People that have minor problems and life issues. I’m not making light of them. But when you do trauma work, you really see some pretty hard stuff.

I met a little fifteen-year-old girl the other day, whose mother, a couple months ago, sent her to live here – from Colorado. She said that she was too busy working out her own problems to take care of her daughter, so she sent her to live with distant relatives eight hours away from where she lived. Then, a month-and-a-half later, she committed suicide and left this little girl all by herself in the world. I listened to that girl talk about her true feelings and it’s a very, very sad thing. And I look at her and I’d take that kid home in a heartbeat. She’s a straight A student. She doesn’t do drugs. She doesn’t have any tattoos. She’s not pierced. I mean, she’s a really clean-cut kid. You know, I like lots of kids that have all that stuff. I don’t worry about that kind of thing. But I’m just trying to explain to you that she’s not a troubled child – or *wasn’t*, until this came up. She has never been in trouble with the law. She is just, pretty much, a straight shooter. She’s the kind of kid anybody would like to have. And yet, looks what’s happened to her. It’s just not right. It’s not fair. Such sadness and such pain! And there isn’t a single thing that anybody can really do about that for her right now. We can reduce some of the traumatic effects, but the grief and the being alone stuff, who can do anything about that?

In our community, a few weeks ago, there was a thirteen-year-old girl, who got in trouble for something she did at school. That afternoon she hung herself with a scarf from her bunkbed and her mother found her that evening. Our whole community has been upset about that – all the school people, the counseling community. If that child only knew how much she was valued and how much she was worth, that never would have happened. But somehow, that message never got communicated to her in our society.

So I know that most of the people listening to this don’t have those kinds of experiences, but when we go to bed at night, after watching the evening news, which is becoming increasingly disturbing – where we see how horrible things are – and then we get up in the morning, after another sunrise, we’re supposed to be reminded that the Sun of righteousness promised to come swiftly with healing and righteous judgment, and the power to solve the problems that we’re looking at in the world today.

So we can hunger, as well, for His righteousness to be shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit – as we have. And we can hunger for Christ to come – when He’s going to set things aright, not just for *us*, but for *everybody* – and cause righteousness to break out all over the earth.

So that sounds like a really great conclusion, doesn’t it, to this sermon. But, it’s not the conclusion, because there are three beatitudes and three holy days yet to come. And how are they connected? And what is the deeper spiritual meaning of those things? Well, get with us next time for the continuation of this series on the beatitudes.