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MINISTRIES

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HUNGER

Matthew 5:6

Blessed are those who **hunger** and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Hunger. Have you ever been hungry? I’m talking STARVING. You know, where your stomach is just growling at you. When you’re really hungry, your focus is on one thing: food!

Have you ever fasted before? It’s kind of funny. Because after a couple of days, even the foods you can’t stand start to look kinda good.

Proverbs 27:7 comes to mind:

Proverbs 27:7

One who is full loathes honey, but to one who is hungry everything bitter is sweet.

If what we *don’t* like is starting to look good, imagine how the food we DO like begins to look.

But we’re talking about *hungering after righteousness* here. So that raises the question: what is righteousness—specifically the righteousness that our Messiah is talking about in Matthew 5:6?

This verse is taken from the famous Sermon on the Mount. We get some insight regarding the Messiah’s definition of the word righteousness by looking at another verse from his sermon where he uses this same word:

Matthew 5:20

For I tell you, unless your **righteousness** exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Here we see that Jesus, his Hebrew name being Yeshua, calls his followers to a way of righteousness

that surpasses the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. In context, this is talking about Torah observance—that is, keeping God’s Law. We know this because of the prior three verses. Yeshua had just finished affirming the ongoing validity of God’s Law in verse 17, saying that he did not come to abolish it but fulfill it (Matthew 5:17). Then he said nothing from the Law would pass away until heaven and earth pass away and everything is accomplished—that is, the end of the age and the consummation of the kingdom, when heaven and earth pass away (Matthew 5:18; Revelation 21:1ff). He also encouraged members of the kingdom to be “great” by keeping even the least of the commandments of God’s Law (Matthew 5:19).

Then we get to verse 20, where Yeshua says members of the kingdom must have a righteousness that surpasses the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. In other words, Yeshua says members of Messiah’s kingdom must be better at following God’s Law than the scribes and Pharisees. How do we do that? That’s what the rest of the Sermon on the Mount is all about. Yeshua sets himself up as the supreme interpreter of God’s Law, and he gives the definitive interpretation in contrast to the teachings of the scribes and Pharisees.

As the scholar Donald Hagner writes:

Since in 5:21-48 Jesus defines righteousness by expounding the true meaning of the law as opposed to wrong or shallow understandings, it is best for us to understand [*plerosai*] here as “fulfill” in the sense of “bring to its intended meaning”—that is, to present a definitive interpretation of the law, something now possible because of the presence of the Messiah and his kingdom. Far from destroying the law, Jesus’ teachings—despite their occasionally strange sound—penetrate to the divinely intended (i.e., the teleological) meaning of the law.

-Donald A. Hagner, Matthew 1-13 (Word Biblical Commentary, 1993), p. 106

So when Yeshua says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,” he is talking about those who hunger for a life of Torah observance in accordance with Yeshua’s teachings.

This type of “righteousness” or “righteous living” is like spiritual bread for us. It’s something we should *partake* of and truly *hunger* for. But how do we do that? How is that accomplished in one’s everyday life? To hunger is to *pursue*, or *yearn* for, and to partake is to *obey*.

If you are obeying his ways, then you are following *HIS* righteousness. Any other type of “righteousness” is insufficient for the Messiah’s kingdom.

Some might misunderstand when Yeshua says you will never enter the kingdom unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees. This doesn’t mean that observing the righteous deeds of the Torah better than the scribes and Pharisees saves us. Yeshua’s statement in Matthew 5:20 is similar to what James teaches about faith and works in his epistle. James doesn’t teach that works save us; he teaches that genuine faith will result in doing good works. In the same way, Yeshua says that members of the kingdom will live righteously.

Again, righteousness according to the Messiah—the righteousness we are to hunger for—is based on God’s Law according to Yeshua’s supreme, authoritative interpretation. Much more could be said about

what that means, but when you examine Yeshua's teachings throughout the gospels, you discover that his primary emphasis over and over was love. He taught a righteousness—a Torah observance—fueled by love.

Matthew 22:34-40

But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. **On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.**"

When you compare Yeshua's definition of righteousness with the supposed righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you can clearly see how theirs falls short. First, they were often hypocrites—they preached the Torah but didn't practice it (Matthew 23:3). Furthermore, their Torah observance was not fueled by love but by a desire to feel superior to others (Matthew 23:5). While they could be commended for their observance of the Torah's lighter commands, they neglected the weightier matters of the Law (Matthew 23:23). Ultimately, they had a mere appearance of righteousness on the outside, but inside their hearts were greediness, self-indulgence, and pride (Matthew 23:25, 28).

It's no wonder that Yeshua didn't base kingdom membership on the supposed righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees! No, Yeshua calls us to *real* righteousness. We are blessed when we hunger for genuine Torah observance fueled by love.

Now, some object to this definition of righteousness on the basis of Philippians 3:8-9.

Philippians 3:8-9 (NASB)

More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus [Messiah Yeshua] my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them mere rubbish, so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having **a righteousness of my own derived from the Law**, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.

Some might say, "How could righteousness have anything to do with God's law when Paul describes righteousness "derived from the law" as being insufficient?"

First, Paul can't be saying that following God's Law is incompatible with true righteousness since he says the exact opposite elsewhere:

2 Timothy 3:16-17

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for **training in righteousness**, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

"All Scripture," of course, includes God's Law. And Paul says that all Scripture is profitable for "training in righteousness." So Paul's definition of righteous living is based on the Scriptures, including

God's Law.

So what's going on in Philippians 3:8-9? To understand what Paul is saying, we have to look at the previous verses.

Philippians 3:2-7 (NASB)

Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and take pride in Christ Jesus [Messiah Yeshua], and put no confidence in the flesh, although I myself could boast as having confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he is confident in the flesh, I have more reason: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. But whatever things were gain to me, these things I have counted as loss because of Christ.

Paul opens up this section of his letter with a warning to beware of certain people—namely, dogs, evil workers, and those of the “false circumcision.”

The term “dogs” is used to describe those who reject God's truth. The Messiah exhorts his followers:

Matthew 7:6

Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.

These people are also called “evil workers” and “of the false circumcision.” While there are different opinions among scholars regarding whom exactly Paul is referring to here, most believe he is referring to Jewish influencers who were seeking to make proselytes to their own particular sect of Judaism. These would be the same troublemakers that Paul deals with in Galatians. These false teachers misused the commandment of circumcision, imposing it on Gentiles as a prerequisite to salvation and inclusion within God's people.

As scholar J.K. McKee explains:

We need to often remember how in various places in the Apostolic Scriptures, “circumcision” (Grk. *peritome*) includes more than just the removal of the foreskin of a male's penis. “Circumcision” in the Apostolic Scriptures is a frequent reference to not only a physical operation, but more especially to the act of conversion to Judaism. In this framework, what can appear to be Paul speaking against a physical act is more a statement of him speaking against ritual proselyte conversion to Judaism being required for inclusion in the community of God.

-J.K. McKee, *Philippians for the Practical Messianic* (McKinney, TX: Messianic Apologetics, 2012), p. 94

Paul was not against circumcision as a biblical practice done in obedience to God. Elsewhere he affirms the value of circumcision (Romans 2:25; 3:1-2).

What Paul opposed was a *misuse* of circumcision. He was against the false teaching that one had to get circumcised before they could be considered a genuine member of God's people. Over and over in his letters, Paul emphasizes that gaining membership within the community of God's people is not based on ethnic status or ritual conversion formulas; it's based on putting one's faith in the Messiah. That's how we become members of God's kingdom. And then being a kingdom member means living as one—which, again, is defined as righteous living according to the Messiah (Matthew 5:20).

But getting back to our passage, Paul goes on to say, “for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and take pride in Christ Jesus [Messiah Yeshua], and put no confidence in the flesh” (Philippians 3:3).

Once again, Paul is saying that those of the “true circumcision” put their confidence in the Messiah. They are not like those of the false circumcision, who put their confidence in their physical circumcision—that is, their ritual status as “Jews,” as defined by the false teachers of Paul's day. Like in Romans, Paul's point is that physical circumcision is valuable only when properly understood and applied. It certainly can't be used to save someone from sin and make them a member of God's people, which is how the false teachers were misusing it.

Paul then says that if anyone could have a reason for boasting “in the flesh,” it would be him. There is absolutely no question of Paul's Jewish status. He was circumcised on the eighth day; he was of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews.

Importantly, Paul identified with the Pharisees in their application of the Law: “as to the Law, a Pharisee.” This means that Paul at one time likely agreed with the teachers he now opposes regarding circumcision being a prerequisite to inclusion within God's people. He viewed having a Jewish status, as defined by his sect of Judaism, as the way to salvation.

This is important context to his next statement, “as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.”

When it came to the standard of righteousness in the Law, according to his sect of Judaism, Paul was blameless. But Paul found that even this was not enough. Despite Paul's exceptional credentials from a human perspective, he goes on to say that it's all meaningless compared to knowing the Messiah.

Now, some might use this passage and twist it to say that Paul no longer considers the Torah to be important. But nothing could be further than the truth. Paul says he now has a righteousness “through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.”

In other words, Paul's desire is to know the Messiah as Lord and Savior—and it's from that basis that *real* righteousness can be achieved. It's not righteousness derived from the Torah alone or even from following the most qualified Pharisaic scholars. No, it's a righteousness that surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees. It's a Torah observance fueled by love and faith, in accordance with Yeshua's teachings.

The point is that the Messiah is central to everything. If we desire to really live righteously, it must flow from faith in the Messiah.

We see in Philippians that Paul *hungered* for this righteousness. And that brings us back to Matthew 5:6.

Matthew 5:6

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Pursue his righteousness. Pursue it like never before. Let it be the air that you breath. Let it be the very blood that flows through your veins.

Let the hunger for *HIS* righteousness drive your life with fervor, zeal and energy that never goes out. Let nothing keep you from getting back up when knocked down.

Yeshua is the goal in this life. Let the fire in your eyes allow NOTHING between you and him. Wake up every morning determined to live your life with purpose, *HIS* purpose. Let your hunger for *HIS* righteousness be the focal point of every element in your life.

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching. Remember, continue to test everything.

Shalom

For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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