



# ***THE PRAYER CLOSET***

Encouraging & Equipping Believers in Prayer

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## **Blessed Are the Starving and Dehydrated**

Radical. Shocking. Challenging. These words describe the teachings of Jesus. His words defy the conventional thinking of the world. One of the best examples of this is **Matthew 5:20**, “For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

Talk about radical, shocking, and challenging! Can you imagine how the people who heard Jesus reacted to these words? After all, the scribes and the Pharisees were the most righteous men in all the land. No one was as righteous as these men. In the eyes of the people, the scribes were the most accurate interpreters of the Scripture. The Pharisees were the most devout practitioners of the Scripture.

Even more radical was Jesus’ promise. If a person were not more righteous than the Pharisees, he would never enter heaven. No salvation. No forgiveness. No eternal glory. Keep in mind these are the words of Jesus Christ the Son of God.

When you and I say never, that usually means that the opposite will happen. However, it is not so with Jesus. This is an ironclad promise – if your righteousness does not exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

When He says “never,” He means never. No exceptions whatsoever.

What kind of righteousness then is Jesus talking about here? Jesus is talking about a righteousness that exists outside of us. It is a

righteousness that we have to receive. It is a righteousness that we are to hunger and thirst for. Jesus declares, “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled” (**Matthew 5:6**). What does it mean to hunger and thirst for righteousness? In this issue of *The Prayer Closet*, we will examine what it means to do this.

### **What Is Righteousness?**

When Jesus Christ refers to “righteousness,” what does He mean by this? Righteousness is right behavior. It means doing what is right. You might think of righteousness as a reputation that gets you into God’s presence. To be righteous means that you have lived the kind of life that is acceptable to God.

The righteousness that Jesus speaks of here is something altogether different than anything you could accomplish on your own. He means righteousness as living rightly in God’s sight so consistently and perfectly that God accepts you. We know that Jesus means comprehensive righteousness because Matthew records an unusual Greek construction here. Instead of using the customary genitive form, Jesus puts the phrase “after righteousness” in the accusative form. What this means is this: Jesus is not talking about some righteousness but all the righteousness in the world.

It boils down to this – the only record of right doing that can gain you an audience with God and satisfy your heart is a comprehensively perfect record. You must live a life that God finds completely right. Jesus says this later in the chapter, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as

your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (**Matthew 5:48**).

As you read this, I’m sure you’re thinking that this is impossible. You’re probably thinking, “There’s no way that anyone can live a perfect life.” And you’re exactly right. The Bible backs you up on this, “As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one” (**Romans 3:10**). If that’s not enough, the Word of God is brutally honest, “But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away” (**Isaiah 64:6**). No one is righteous. Our righteousness, our personal righteousness, is no better than filthy, stained rags. Not a pretty picture, is it? Yet, it’s the truth.

It should come as no surprise that the only standard of righteousness that God accepts is perfection. You would expect nothing less from the holy, holy, holy Lord (**Isaiah 6:3**). What may surprise you is what Jesus is **not** saying. He is not saying that you need to strive and achieve that kind of righteousness in order to be acceptable to God. He is saying something far more radical. He is actually saying that you cannot achieve this righteousness but only receive it as a gift.

Jesus says blessed is the one who “hungers” and “thirsts” for righteousness. The words used here refer to someone who is starving and dehydrated. How can a person who is starving and dehydrated achieve anything on his own? If you are starving, you don’t plant a garden. You want food now; you cry out for food. If you are dehydrated and dying of thirst, you don’t have strength or time to dig a well. You beg for water. You need someone with food and water to have mercy on you and satisfy your hunger and thirst. You need someone to give you the food and water that you need lest you die.

We cannot live a life that makes us acceptable to God. We do not have the righteousness that can gain an audience with God and can merit His acceptance. How then can a person have this kind of righteousness? It has to be received as the gift of God!

The Word of God says, “But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the

prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference” (**Romans 3:21-22**). It is crucial to notice that there is a righteousness that God provides. It is given to those who trust in Jesus Christ. This is the promise of Scripture – every person who trusts in Jesus Christ receives this righteousness from God. God gives this righteousness to those who will turn from their sin to trust solely in Jesus Christ.

Jesus wants you to exchange your self-righteousness for true righteousness that will make you acceptable to God. When Jesus Christ died on the Cross, our sins were placed on Him and punished in Him. Yet, when you trust in Jesus Christ, God imputes or credits to you the righteous, perfect life of Jesus Christ to you. This means that you are acceptable to God. This means you can approach God and have a relationship with Him.

Think about it like this. Imagine that your spiritual bank account is overdrawn 50 billion dollars and Jesus paid off all your creditors by taking your sin on His shoulders. You would have no debt whatsoever! What a glorious message and truth! Jesus paid a debt that you could have never paid. Yet, God does more than this. Now your heavenly Father deposits to your account all the money in the world by taking the sinless, perfect life of Jesus Christ and crediting it to your account. This money will never run out; your account is full of all the righteousness that you will ever need. You don’t have to look for ways to earn credits with God because your bank account is already filled to overflowing with the perfect life of your Savior, Jesus Christ!

## Hungering And Thirsting

Jesus says that the blessed person hungers and thirsts for righteousness. When you see that you are bankrupt spiritually, you turn to Christ. When you turn to Christ, you receive His righteousness by faith according to God’s promise. This is what brings satisfaction! Your heart is satisfied because you are accepted with God; you are right with God.

Because of Christ's righteousness received by faith, you are filled!

You also have to understand that this continues in your walk with God. The unfortunate thing is that we are wired for self-righteousness. There is an innate desire to work and strive in order to please God and earn your acceptance with Him. This is especially true when you fail, when you sin. When we make a mess in our lives, we feel like we must do something to make ourselves right with God – that we have to earn our way back into God's favor.

In these situations, our first impulse is to try to establish our own righteousness. This is the righteousness of panic. We add more Bible reading and church attendance and listening to sermons to our calendar because we think, "I need to get my act together. I'm such a mess and I need to do something about it."

Yet, if we do this, it only leads to guilt, shame, and hopelessness. Our hunger and thirst for righteousness should drive us to Christ, not to do increasingly more. It is only when we rest in Christ that we will be filled – that we will be satisfied. When we first come to Christ, we trust in Him and His righteousness. Yet, we continue to do this in our walk with Him.

We are to persevere in resting in His righteousness to make us righteous – to make us acceptable to God. We are to begin every day banking anew all our hope on the righteousness of Jesus Christ. If you continually remind yourself that you are accepted completely and solely because of the comprehensively perfect righteousness of Christ, then you can be confident that He will never reject you but always loves you and accepts you. Jesus and Jesus alone has what it takes for you, yesterday, today, and forever. We are to rest in His perfect righteousness daily, experiencing the satisfaction of being right with God, loved, forgiven, and accepted by God.

## **The Blessedness of Starving And Thirsting For Righteousness**

What are the blessings of those who hunger and thirst for righteousness?

- *We are set free from guilt and shame.* When we rest in Christ's righteousness, it enables us to overcome shame and guilt. Rather than being weighed down by these things, we are freed from them to live in peace, hope, and joy.
- *We are rescued from the never-ending cycle of self-righteousness.* When you depend on your own righteousness, it will never be enough. You will always have to do more and more to make sure you've done enough – even though you know that it will never be enough. When you rest in Christ's righteousness, you are delivered from such bondage. You can walk in peace and joy knowing that you are accepted with Him.
- *We are blessed with the confidence of acceptance with God.* When you rest in Christ's righteousness, you can have the confidence that God accepts you. This gives you the confidence to pray with boldness and serve God without fear. You can walk with God, knowing that He is with you and for you.
- *This nourishes and strengthens our meekness.* When you know that God accepts and loves you, it frees you up to love and bless others. Resting in Christ's righteousness empowers you to walk in meekness before others.
- *Resting in Christ's righteousness enables us to grow in Christ.* Jesus has taught us that we are poor in spirit – bankrupt before God, with nothing to offer God to make ourselves right with Him. He has also taught us that we mourn over our sin – grieving over our sin before God. It would be easy to wallow in our brokenness and grief over sin. It would be easy to grow discouraged and despondent concerning our situation. Yet, when you rest in His righteousness, it lifts you out of the muddy mire of sin, guilt, and brokenness. It stirs your heart to love, to serve, to pray and to seek after God. It reminds that even though you are bankrupt and sinful, because of Christ's righteousness, you are accepted, forgiven, and loved by God. Your account before God bursts with righteousness and you will never start a day with a deficit! Every day will be a surplus. You will continue to see

your bankruptcy before God. You will continue to mourn over your sin and failure to obey God perfectly. However, that will make you hunger and thirst for Jesus' righteousness that has been credited to your account. Every day you repent of your self-righteousness and embrace His righteousness by faith.

## Satisfied But Dissatisfied

Jesus promises us that when we hunger and thirst for righteousness, we will be satisfied. When we trust in Christ and rest in His righteousness, we will be satisfied by knowing that God accepts us and loves us as we are. We will have the joy, confidence, and peace of knowing that we are in a right relationship with God, loved and secured in Him.

At the same time, we will also experience dissatisfaction. Even though we have such a deep satisfaction in Christ, our hearts will still long and desire. What will we long for and desire? We will long for and desire a life that is righteous. We crave to be righteous in our thoughts, our words, and our actions. We know that God accepts us through Christ. We know, that in our standing before God, we are clothed in Christ's righteousness, perfect, accepted, and loved. However, what we have in our standing, we want to be true in our state. What God has declared in the high court of heaven, we want to be a living reality on earth, in our lives.

Resting in Christ's righteousness doesn't inhibit pursuing holiness and Christian maturity. It actually motivates and stirs us to seek it with all our beings. Paul writes in **Philippians 3:13**, "And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." Paul is resting in Christ's righteousness! Yet, Paul goes on to say this, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (**Philippians 3:14**). We see Paul striving and laboring to grow and mature in Christ. He rested

in Christ's righteousness and then pursued a godly, obedient life.

When you rest in Christ's righteousness, you know that God accepts you and loves you. You can then pursue a righteous life not because you HAVE to but because you WANT to! You move from having to serve God because you're trying to earn His favor to serving Him because of your gratitude for what He has done for you! Grace stirs us to pursue a righteous life. While we have the satisfaction of resting in Christ's righteousness, we are dissatisfied with our daily life and seek to grow in personal righteousness before God.

This is why we read and study the Word. This is why we pray. This is why confess our sins and repent. This is why we attend church. This is why we seek to become more mature disciples of Jesus Christ. All that we do as Christians is not to earn God's favor or merit His love. It is because we have experienced His favor and love through Jesus Christ. That's why we labor and work and strive with all of our beings to grow in obedience and Christian maturity. Resting in Christ's righteousness drives us, fuels us, to pursue growth and maturity in Christ.

## Conclusion

Christianity is not about making yourself a Christian. It is about ceasing and desisting from the foul and futile attempt to save yourself by your own works, merit, or background. It is about repenting of your own righteousness and by faith embracing the righteousness of Christ – the perfect, sinless, obedient life of Christ. And it is about doing it every day. Have you done this? Have you forsaken all your attempts to make yourself acceptable by your own merit and works? Have you turned to Christ, trusting solely in Him – His life, His death, and His resurrection – to make you acceptable and right before God? If you haven't, I plead with you now – repent, turn away, turn loose of your own righteousness – your works, your background, you merit, and your good deeds. Forsake them and trust in Christ! By faith, embrace Him.

Confess Him as your Savior and Lord! It is your only hope.

Perhaps you can say that you have done this. My question to you is, "Are you continuing to do this? Are you daily embracing Christ and His righteousness?" Maybe right now, you need to confess your self-righteousness. Maybe you need to come to God and admit that you have been focused on your good deeds, your works, and your merit. It's time to turn back to Christ and renew your faith in Him.

Perhaps you're discouraged. You just don't seem to be growing. You are plagued by a sense of unworthiness and hopelessness. Right now, remember that you are clothed in Christ's righteousness – His perfect, sinless, obedient life. God accepts you and loves you. He will not give up on you. He will not reject you or forsake you. Right now, thank Him for this gift and the peace and confidence that it brings. Now, even now, ask Him to change you and trust Him. Keep pursuing Him; keep seeking Him. You don't have to be insecure in your walk with Him. Seek Him with all your heart, knowing that He is for you and is willing to change you and grow you.

## Pleading For Spiritual Growth

The grace of God in Jesus Christ drives us to pursue spiritual growth, "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world" (**Titus 2:11-12**). Part of pursuing spiritual growth is praying for that growth. Spiritual growth is impossible in our own strength. We must seek God for His help and empowering to grow and pursue a righteous life.

The following Scripture prayers can aid you in praying for your spiritual growth and the spiritual growth of your church:

Father, I plead that the believers of \_\_\_\_\_ Church would desire the Word as a newborn baby desires milk. Remove anything from their lives that would hinder this. I pray that the believers of \_\_\_\_\_ Church would grow to spiritual maturity (**1 Peter 2:1-2**).

I pray that the believers of \_\_\_\_\_ Church would be convicted and convinced that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God. I plead that they would understand the doctrines of the Bible. I also ask that they would be convicted of their sin through the Word of God, then shown how to deal with it and instructed in how to live lives that please You. Do this so that the believers of \_\_\_\_\_ Church would be complete and mature, thoroughly equipped for every good work (**2 Timothy 3:16-17**).

Holy Spirit, I plead that You will grant the believers of \_\_\_\_\_ Church a deeper understanding of Your Word (**John 16:14**).

I pray that the believers of \_\_\_\_\_ Church would hide Your Word in their heart so that they would not sin against You. I plead that You would grant them a desire to memorize the Word. Enable the believers of \_\_\_\_\_ Church to do this by the power of the Holy Spirit (**Psalms 119:11**).

I ask that the believers of \_\_\_\_\_ Church will meditate on Your Word and that they would contemplate Your ways in the Word (**Psalms 119:15**).

Open the believers' eyes so that they may see the wondrous truths of Your Word (**Psalms 119:18**).

Give the believers of \_\_\_\_\_ Church understanding in Your Word so that they would obey Your Word. Enable them to observe Your commands with their whole heart (**Psalms 119:34**).

O God, Your hands have made and fashioned the believers of \_\_\_\_\_ Church. I ask that You will give them understanding so that they can learn Your commandments (**Psalms 119:73**).

I pray that the believers of \_\_\_\_\_ Church will love Your Word with all their heart. I ask that the Word will be their meditation all the day (**Psalms 119:97**).

I ask that Your Word would be a lamp to the believers' feet and a light to the believers' path. Cause them to make the Word of God the final guide for what they believe and how they live their lives (**Psalm 119:105**).

I pray that the believers of \_\_\_\_\_ Church would long for Your Word (**Psalm 119:131**).

I ask that You would direct the believers' steps according to Your Word and let no sin have dominion over them (**Psalm 119:133**).

I plead that the believers of \_\_\_\_\_ Church would hate and abhor lying but I ask that they would love Your Word (**Psalm 119:163**).

I ask that the believers of \_\_\_\_\_ Church would search the Scriptures (**John 5:39**).

I pray that the believers of \_\_\_\_\_ Church would be directed to keep Your Word (**Psalm 119:5**).

## Praying For God's Name To Be Hallowed

Jesus Christ has taught us to pray for the name of God to hallowed (**Matthew 6:9**). This means that we are to pray for God's name to be honored and magnified. The following is a prayer guide to assist you in putting this teaching of Jesus into practice. Each prayer helps you to pray for yourself, your church, and your city or area:

"Father, enable me to tear down the idols in my life that You hate; teach me to love and worship You above all. I ask that You would break down the idols in my church. Remove anything that we have exalted above you. Our area is filled with idols and false worship. O God, smash the idols that people love and pursue and open their eyes to who You and Your Son Jesus Christ are" (**Deuteronomy 16:21-22**).

Holy God, deliver me from profaning Your name; enable me to honor your name in my thoughts, words, and actions. Help me to declare Your name to all around me. Father, I ask that my

church will honor Your name and will declare and defend Your name to our area. Lord, have mercy on those in our area that profane Your name. Reveal Yourself to them; enable them to come to a saving knowledge of who You are (**Exodus 20:7**).

Father, forgive me of being unthankful toward You; cultivate a spirit of gratitude in me. Do the same in my church. Unleash a spirit of grateful worship in us. O God, manifest Your goodness to this area; have mercy on the unthankful and save them by Your grace (**Romans 1:21**).

Father, wash me thoroughly of forgetting You; I ask that I would always keep You in mind. I plead that my church will not forget You; deliver us from setting You aside for worldly pleasures and pursuits. Lord God, burden the minds of the people in this area with Your presence – Your reality. Prepare their hearts to hear the gospel through this (**Psalm 10:4; Psalm 16:8**).

Father, cleanse me of simply going through the motions in worship. Empower me to draw near to You and worship You in spirit in truth. I plead that my church will worship You; deliver us from being content with going through the motions. O God, You desire to be worshiped. Save people throughout this area so that they can come and worship You in spirit and truth (**Isaiah 29:13**).

Father, teach me to glorify You in all things. Purge me of any self-exaltation. I plead in Jesus' name that my church will seek to glorify You. Rescue us from the pride that will hinder us from doing this. I also ask that You will shatter the pride of the people in this area, bringing them to trust solely in Your Son Jesus Christ for salvation (**Romans 1:21**).

Lord God, I ask that I will serve You with all my heart for Your glory; deliver me from ever believing that it is futile to serve You. I plead that my church will serve You with all of our being. O God, I pray that the people in this area will see the futility of worldly pursuits and pleasures. Cause them to see that living for You and serving You brings true meaning and purpose for life (**Malachi 3:14**).

O God, forgive me of my prayerlessness – my failure to seek You. I ask You to teach me how to pray and for the grace to pray. I pray that You will unleash a spirit of prayer in my church; teach us to pray and help us to seek You with all our strength. Sovereign Lord, save people throughout this area that they might have and know the joy and privilege of prayer (**Zephaniah 1:4-6**).

O God, rescue me from rebelling against You and Your Word; I submit to You and pray for the grace and strength to know, submit, and obey Your will for my life. Father, grant us a clean heart; renew within us a right spirit. Direct us in Your will and guard us from straying from that will. Father, have mercy on the people of this area. I plead that they will be convicted of their rebellion. I ask that they will turn from their sin to Christ in true faith, repenting of their rebellion and submitting to Your good and holy will (**Isaiah 1:2**).

Father, I confess that You are the wise, powerful, and good God; rescue me from doubting and testing you in the adversity of life. Help me to trust You in all things. O God, I plead that my church will remember You in prosperity and will trust in You in adversity. Deepen and strengthen our trust in You. I plead that the people of this area will see and know that You are good, wise, and powerful. I ask that they will come to understand that You are the God who can be trusted. In Jesus' name, I pray that they will turn from their sins and will trust in You as their God and Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord (**Psalms 95:8-9**).

## The Prayer Closet Ministries Update

At the time I'm writing this newsletter, we are close to finishing our ministry center. The electrical work is almost done. Then the floor will be sealed and the insulation put in the building. At that point, we will be ready to move in. Please continue to pray for this

building and the finances to pay for it. I would ask you to consider prayerfully giving to this ministry. Your donations will go straight to ministry and will be used to make a difference in the lives of people across this nation and the world. Your gifts will enable us to pay for this ministry center and to carry on the daily operations of the ministry.

I would also appreciate your prayers for this ministry. I covet the prayers of God's people. As you have opportunity, please pray over the following concerns:

- Open doors for my (Kevin) teaching and preaching ministry;
- God's anointing on me to minister, preach, and write;
- God's direction for and protection over this ministry;
- Greater circulation of our materials and deeper impact on people and churches through them.

Thanking you in advance for your prayers. May God richly bless you and sustain you.

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