

Matthew 5:6

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/matt/matt-5/matthew-56/>

(D) is the first central theme of Jesus's chiasm. It focuses on the path to gain and desire to possess social harmony and righteousness.

The parallel account of this teaching is found in Luke 6:21.

Jesus's statement (D) *Makarios are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied*, corresponds with (D') *Makarios are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy*.

Jesus's statement about *righteousness* lies at the heart of the "Beatitudes"—His *Makarios* chiasm.

With few exceptions, *hunger* and *thirst* were conditions that were universally experienced throughout the ancient world. The people living in Judea were certainly not exempt. Without the aid of modern agriculture or refrigeration, food production and storage were constantly unstable and at the mercy of drought, famine, and war. Even with aqueducts, access to fresh, clean water was limited to natural access points of rivers, lakes, springs, and wells. It required constant effort to overcome the dry heat of Judea's landscape. Jesus's disciples and the vast majority of Matthew's readers alike would have experienced real pain from *hunger* more than once in their lives. Working in the towns and fields or traveling the roads of Judea, all of them would have regularly felt an intense *thirst* for water. When we *hunger and thirst*, we think of little else than having that pang satisfied. It is constantly upon our minds, and we seek it relentlessly.

Jesus is not talking here about a *hunger* for nourishing food or a *thirst* for life-sustaining water. He is talking about a *hunger and thirst for life-sustaining righteousness* (social harmony). To pursue *Righteousness* relentlessly, as though our life depended upon it. Because in the sense of gaining *Makarios*, it does.

In the Old Testament, *Righteousness* meant keeping an oath or abiding to a covenant agreement. The primary requirement of fulfilling most covenants was for the vassal to faithfully serve the ruler or suzerain. In God's covenant with Israel, He was the Great Suzerain, and the nation Israel was the vassal. *Righteousness* came from fulfilling the demands of the Law, obedience to the commands of the Great Ruler. God's *righteousness* was demonstrated throughout the Old Testament by keeping His promises (2 Chronicles 12:1-6; Psalm 7:3-17; Jeremiah 9:23-24).

Righteousness is best depicted as a social harmony that exists when two or more parties honor their agreements—both externally (letter of the law) and internally (spirit of the law). God always keeps His word. When we obey His commands, there is *righteousness*. *Righteousness* is the key to gaining *Makarios*, which is why Jesus tells us to seek it as though we are seeking water when we are dying of *thirst*, or food if we are dying of *hunger*.

Paul's letter to the Romans addresses the question "What is *righteousness* and how is it obtained?" In that respect, Romans is similar to Plato's "Republic," which was an influential work written several centuries earlier that founded Greek philosophy. In the "Republic," Plato explains Socrates' conclusion that righteousness, or justice, is when everyone in the city state does what they do best for the benefit of all. Paul reaches a similar conclusion, stating in Romans 12 that righteousness looks like a body where all the body parts are playing their part well, in harmony with their design.

Where Paul and Plato differ is in their analysis of the Head. Paul states that there is only one Head, and it is Christ. Believers are righteous when they serve with their gifts in obedience to the Head, the "brain" of the Body of Christ, which is Christ. Plato's head is a subset of fallible humans, whom he fantasizes will have a noble nature. True *righteousness*, or justice, is social harmony in obedience to the commands of Jesus.

Both Jesus's disciples and Matthew's Jewish readers would have known that *righteousness* can come through faith as it did to Abraham (Genesis 15:6). But in this sermon Jesus is not talking about being made righteous by faith in the sight of God, to be "justified" as Paul will later describe (Romans 3-4).

The *righteousness* (social harmony) that Jesus is describing is a prevailing justice that flows into daily life for the covenant people when the Law is adhered to and kept. A society flourishes when a group of self-governing individuals respect and follow the rule of law toward one another. When the rule of law is followed voluntarily, the community doesn't have to spend time, energy, and wealth guarding what is theirs from robbers or tyrants. When a community follows the rule of law because they choose to do so, it frees them to invest their energy in being productive. The things they produce and the services they provide are a blessing not only to them but to the whole community.

Human law and government are imperfect. Even our best systems are corrupted by selfish and greedy men who lust for power. Such corruption results in unending cries *for righteousness*. While these cries are real and right, they are often subverted and hijacked by equally greedy and crafty men. The promised harmony and *righteousness* are not much better than the corruption it had vowed to replace. The end result is disappointment and cynicism, where no one is *satisfied*. Those who are full of their own *righteousness* will *thirst* and starve.

Jesus and His kingdom offer true *righteousness*, which is what we must *hunger and thirst for*: "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). As God, Jesus is the perfect King. His Law is the perfect Law of love and liberty (Romans 3:8; James 1:25). His reign is perfectly just.

Jesus's message here is that humankind needs to stop hungering and thirsting for broken *righteousness* according to the lies of the world systems (or their own faulty systems of righteousness). He promises that *those who hunger and thirst for His righteousness will be satisfied*. These are the ones who are *Makarios*. The social harmony His Kingdom provides is unlike anything the world offers. It is the byproduct of living with a heart that loves our neighbor as we love ourself. It is the fruit of living with self-governing responsibility with the perfect law

of liberty in a way that is eager to bless and serve others (Galatians 5:13-14). This is true social harmony. This is justice. This is the *righteousness* that nourishes and sustains society. Those who *shall* live in such a society are *Makarios*.

Biblical Text

5:6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they sha