

## Hungering for Righteousness Psalm 51:10-13

In **Mt. 4:14** we read, *“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” But he answered, “It is written, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”*” We can feed our empty souls by filling them with every word that comes from the mouth of God.

Jesus in **Mt. 5:6** said, *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”* Everyone, including Jesus in his human form, gets hungry and thirsty. When you’re really hungry or thirsty, your body cries out for the food and or water that it needs. When one is really hungry it is hard to think of much else than eating. That is the kind of hunger that we need in our spiritual lives. **Psalm 42:1** says, *“As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God.”* Man possesses a spiritual hunger that only the Creator can satisfy.

People seek that for which they hunger. Some seek power, some fame, some money, and some the things of the flesh. All these things are temporal and will perish. What are you seeking? *What you seek and hunger for determines the direction of your life.* If you seek only the temporal and you miss the spiritual, you have missed the only thing that will satisfy you for eternity. Without God, everything is in vain.

In our Scripture reading this morning David was crying out to God for a clean heart and a renewed steadfast spirit. He had been broken by sin and needed God’s help to restore his soul in and to God.

When we hear the word *“righteous,”* **we often think of a person’s character; but the word actually describes a relationship.** When people fail to have a right relationship with the Lord, God considers them as unrighteous. The righteous person loves and obeys God, while the unrighteous person ignores God and feeds on his passions. God described Rehoboam, the son of Solomon and king of Judah, this way in **2 Chronicles 12:14**, *“And he did evil, for he did not set his heart to seek the LORD.”* When people ignore the Lord and live according to their own desires, they fail to enter into a right relationship with the Lord. **When people seek the Lord, they choose to live righteously.**

How we regard God determines how we choose to live. Seeking and loving the Lord shapes our character. The more we know and love the Lord, the more we want to be like Him. God is righteous, and we learn righteousness from Him. **God is holy and righteous, and He expects those who follow Him to live that way too!** In **Leviticus 11:45** we read, *“For I am the LORD who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.”* **Habakkuk 1:13** says, *“Your eyes are too pure*

*to approve evil, and you cannot look on wickedness with favor.” **God is utterly holy,** and He wants us to live holy lives. **Hebrews 12:14** says, “**Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.**”*

Sadly, some have come to believe that we have no responsibility to clean up our lives; to leave the old man of sin behind and to conform to the ways of the Lord. **Romans 12:2** says, “**Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.**” Christianity always goes against the ways of the world. *And those who think they are more religious or more Christian because they try to fit their faith into the culture have missed the mark.* **You can’t compromise what the Lord teaches about morals and salvation and at the same time become stronger Christians.**

The Bible never contemplates the idea of going back into an old life of sin in order to be a better Christian. Peter wrote in **1 Peter 1:13-19**, “**Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.**”

The Lord Jesus paid the ultimate price so that we might be cleansed from all unrighteousness. He didn’t buy your freedom from sin with silver and gold. He paid for your freedom with His blood, *because He didn’t want you to continue that destructive way of life.* **He expected** something better from you and for you. **Ephesians 2:8-10** says, “**For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.**” God’s grace is abundant; but *He saves us in order to transform our lives.* We must never cheapen God’s grace by taking it for granted.

Some intentionally choose to sin against God, believing they can ask for forgiveness later. They presume the grace of God allows them to live as they please as long as they pray for forgiveness afterward.

Paul disagrees with this type of thinking, in **Romans 6:1-2** he says, *“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?”* Christians must forsake that old way of life in order to fulfill God’s will for their lives. **2 Peter 2:20-21** puts it this way, *“For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them.”* Christians who return to a sinful way of life and are overcome by it are worse off than if they had never become Christians.

Many today do not **want a Jesus who doesn’t** judge the heart and actions of man. They want a Jesus who would approve of them no matter what they do, a Jesus who will not ask them to repent, and a Jesus who requires nothing of them. They presume the grace of God will cover them no matter how they live, what they think, or with whom they have sex. The Jesus they seek, however, does not exist; you cannot find such a Jesus in Scripture. You can find a Jesus full of grace, but not a grace that will leave you alone in your sin. The grace of the Jesus from Scripture tells you after He has forgiven you – **“Go and sin no more.”** The Lord does not leave you where He found you. **He will transform your life to conform with the holiness and righteousness that He teaches.**

The Bible calls Jesus the *“righteous One”* in **1 Jn. 2:2** and the *“righteous judge”* in **2 Tim. 4:8**. Paul told the pagan philosopher in **Acts 17:30-31**, *“The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”*

Our post-modern culture is very much like Jerusalem in the seventh century before the time of the exile. The people were idolatrous and had pushed God out of their hearts and lives. In the past they had honored God, but their hearts had turned away from Him. **Zephaniah 3:2** charged Jerusalem with four great errors: *“She listens to no voice; she accepts no correction. She does not trust in the LORD; she does not draw near to her God.”* Today our country will not listen to God’s instructions; they no longer want to hear the gospel of Scripture. People today want to rewrite the gospel and take out the call to *“repent.”* They prefer to live by their own rules and want a God to accept their sinful lifestyles rather than to conform to His will.

Righteousness includes obeying the commandments of God. Righteousness is the opposite of lawlessness. Paul told Timothy, (**2 Tim. 2:15**) *“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.”* Paul instructed Timothy to handle God’s word accurately. A reckless handling of God’s word is a cause for shame. We must study God’s word to

know what it says and then teach it accurately. In **1 Tim. 4:16** Paul said, ***“Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.”*** To depart from the truth can cause a person to lose his soul, and those who hear false teaching can be led away from the truth and also lose his soul.

**It matters what we believe!** Learn to think Biblically and to distinguish what the Scripture actually teaches from what is false and human. If the word of truth doesn't contain the doctrine, don't believe it. If the word of truth doesn't instruct the practice, then reject it. You can't follow God and follow man-made religion at the same time.

Some today have stopped trusting what God says in Scripture. They believe many of the narratives found in Scripture are myths or legends. They doubt Adam and Eve, the flood, the crossing of the Red Sea. They think they are the products of chance and evolution rather than created in God's image. **If you doubt God, you will see no reason to obey His moral teaching found in the Bible.** Our coins say *“in God we trust,”* but we have thrown His word out of the public schools. *References to God these days come in the form of taking His name in vain.* We ignore what God has said about the sanctity of life and the sanctity of marriage. One in seven Americans no longer believes in the concept of sin. However, even if billions of people doubt God, God is still God. Even if billions doubt his teaching, the words of Jesus will still judge us on the last day.

When people push God out of their hearts, they reap a bitter harvest. Solomon says it well in **Prov. 10:16**, ***“The wage of the righteous leads to life, the gain of the wicked to sin.”*** It matters whether we follow God. **Psalm 1** reveals the destinies of the righteous and the wicked. **Verses 3-6** say the righteous ***“He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore, the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.”*** Righteousness isn't some strange fad or hobby; it is the difference between eternal life and eternal death.

**Why does God require us to live righteously?** He does so because He loves us and wants what is best for us. *Our faith makes a difference in every aspect of our lives.* Christianity is not a once-a-week pastime; it is a daily walk with God. God's way is the way of love, of truth, of kindness, of peace, and of integrity. God's way gives us faith, hope, and love. It teaches us where we come from, why we are here, and what will happen to us after we die. It gives us a reason to live, to serve, and to love. *Christian righteousness lifts people out of harmful sins and behaviors and provides a new way of life that blesses everyone.*

*The very fiber of our society depends on “**being right with God.**” **Proverbs 14:34** says, “**Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.**”* When people forget God, they are far more willing to do things God will not allow. Love for God motivates us to live virtuous and noble lives. It helps us overcome destructive behaviors. *When people follow Christ, they become better citizens, better fathers and mothers, better husbands and wives, better parents, and neighbors.* Nothing today will improve our lives more than taking hold of the Christian life and pursuing it with all our hearts. Let’s set our hearts to desire God and to seek righteousness. Let us take our faith seriously and take up our crosses daily and follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus in **Mt. 6:33** said, **“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”** The Lord **Jesus has made His righteousness and His kingdom a priority.** He doesn’t merely say seek them, no, **He says seek them first.** We are often so busy making a living, raising our children, and pursuing our passions that we forget our souls. The Lord said in **Mt. 16:25-27**,

***“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.”***

Please take the Lord seriously, and get right with God today.

You can’t earn a right standing with God by your own doing; it comes by the gift of God’s grace through the blood of Jesus. ***But to enjoy God’s grace, you must meet His conditions:*** You must believe in Jesus Christ, that He is the Son of God; you must repent of your sins and determine to follow Jesus; you must confess Christ before others; and you must be baptized in water in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. When you are baptized into Christ, you are also baptized into His death according to **Romans 6:3**. Jesus shed His blood in death. And the Lord washes you in His blood when you are united with Him in His death, burial and resurrection in baptism according to **Romans 6:4-7**. Won’t you first seek His kingdom and His righteousness? Then come and obey the Lord this day!