

The Beatitudes (4)

**'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.'**

Clearly human hunger and thirst can be of two kinds and on two levels. The most obvious is the physical, a bodily hunger and thirst; but there is also that which is of the mind and spirit. We speak of people being 'hungry' for money, 'hungry' for attention, or for success or acceptance or a host of other things. People's desires and longings are not only bodily and physical ones. There are mental and emotional ones as well.

In the main, these tend to be external, worldly and even sensuous. People's interests and desires tend to focus in that direction. It is the worldly and external things which usually arouse the greatest attention and interest. These are the things which absorb and fascinate people most of all. And as it is today so it was in the Lord's time. An appetite, a craving even, for external things. A materialistic outlook on life. An interest in, and pursuit of, worldly objectives only.

This is a universal tendency. It is always there and present with everyone. And because of this the Lord spoke of nobler objectives to which He would have us direct our interests and aspirations. His call is always a call to higher things, and it is such a call to higher things which is contained in the fourth Beatitude, 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they will be filled.' People hunger and thirst after many things and think to find fulfilment and happiness in attaining them. We must use both our will and our understanding, in reaching out for righteousness.

However no one reaches out for righteousness, for the Lord's order in their lives, unless they are dissatisfied with the way things are at present. No one wants or desires something, unless they are conscious of the need. One doesn't just automatically hunger and thirst after righteousness. One comes to desire it after looking into one's life and after seeing how disorderly things are there. Genuine aspiration for the food and drink of eternal life is born of self examination and repentance, and of the realisation of the shallowness and emptiness of our lives apart from the Lord. A person only really longs for the Lord's goodness if they see they have no goodness of their own. They also only really long for the Lord's truth if they realise that their own ideas and opinions about how to conduct life are totally inadequate for

the job. 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness' and these can only be those who have looked into themselves and are discontented with what they find there 'for they shall be filled.

Such longing of the human soul is spoken of in many places in Scripture, in the Old Testament as well as the New.

'As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God.'

[Psalm 42:1](#).

'You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water,' [Psalm 63:1](#).

You will perhaps recall from the Old Testament words which are found in [Isaiah 55:1](#), 'Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.' And then, in the New Testament, the Lord's own words 'Then Jesus declared, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.' [John 6:35](#)

It has been said that the aspiration for spiritual qualities, for good and truth, and for the descent of the Lord's order into one's life is the only aspiration in which the human soul can be assured that it will never meet with disappointment. There is at no time any unwillingness on the Lord's part to satisfy such an aspiration and in time His order can fill our lives and pervade our every thought and activity. Aspiration "renders the soul receptive to the thing aspired to, and if in earnest aspiration, and with our whole being, we hunger and thirst after righteousness, we are sure to be satisfied". Charles A. Hall, *'The Blessed Way'* page 60.

But, as with meekness and the other qualities mentioned in the earlier Beatitudes, righteousness, needs to be defined. We need to have a clear understanding of what is meant before we can aspire after it. Swedenborg wrote, 'righteousness consists in doing all things according to divine order.' ([True Christianity/True Christian Religion 96](#)) Righteousness is what accords with Divine order. Indeed righteousness is divine order itself. To hunger and thirst after righteousness means therefore to long for and to aspire after divine order. It means to earnestly desire the Lord's order in our thoughts and affections. It is to yearn to live according to what we know of Divine order, and to want that order to descend into our lives.

What though is the Lord's order? Isn't this the question which next suggests itself? And the answer is not difficult to come by. The Lord's order is such as we find it set out in the Ten Commandments. His order is that we should not murder, adulterate, steal, lie or covet, either in act or intention. His order also is that we should act towards and think about others as we would have them act towards and think about us. [Matthew 7.12](#). His order is that we should be forgiving and merciful; that we should try to be more trusting in Providence, and more loving in our relationships. It was His new commandment that we are to love one another. [John 13:34](#).

From Swedenborg 'Divine order is nothing but the perpetual commandment of God; and therefore living according to the commandments of God, and in the commandments of God, is living according to Divine order, and is Divine order.' ([Heavenly Secrets/Arcana Caelestia 2634](#)). In effect what the Beatitude is doing is emphasising the importance of striving to live according to the teaching of the Commandments. 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled.' Two activities are spoken of here, both hungering and thirsting. And this speaks to us of the combined activity of both the will and the understanding in striving after the Lord's order in our lives. It is not enough just to want that order, to wish for it in some emotional way; we must also strive to find out what it is.

But why should we reach out for righteousness and seek after the Lord's order in our lives? Is it so we can live with our consciences and be at peace with ourselves? Why indeed should we strive after any of the qualities spoken of in the Beatitudes? The answer is that it is the Lord's way which better fits us to serve our fellowman and bring them happiness. If I am selfish and evil, and so long as I am selfish and evil, I can only diminish the happiness of those around me and with whom I have contact. And this is what is wrong with being selfish and evil. By living according to the Lord's order and striving after it, we equip ourselves to affect the lives of others around us for good.

One writer speaks of this Beatitude as 'the kindest and most encouraging' of them all. He points to the fact that it is not those who have attained righteousness, who are called blessed, but those who hunger and thirst after it. The blessedness does not rest on the achievement, but rather on the effort being made. This is what matters.