

Hungering for a Righteous Nation
Why Should We Care?
Matthew 5:6, 6:5-13, 22:34-40, Revelation 5:11-14, 11:15
Sermon Outline

Introduction: Jesus tells us to love our neighbors as ourselves—a command that should make social and political activists of us. But how do we “go public” in this way without fighting with each other? That will be the focus of the series before us. Today we will ask two questions: (1) Where does Christian public engagement begin? And (2) What does it look like?

I) Where does Christian public engagement begin?

Hungering and thirsty after righteousness (Matthew 5:6)

A) What “righteousness” does not mean.

B) What “righteousness” does mean

Seeking, first and from the heart, God himself, his smile, and his rule

1) Seeking God’s welcoming smile

“Righteousness” as vindication and acquittal

Why does Jesus bless those who “hunger and thirst” for this?

Meaning for the social activist

2) Yearning for God himself

Matthew 6:5-6: Don’t show off...pray to your Father in secret

Meaning for the social activist

3) Longing for God’s just and loving rule on planet earth

Matthew 6:10: Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven

Imaginations made captive by the sights and sounds of glory

Revelation 5:11: Then I looked, and I heard...To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever.

Revelation 11:15: The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our God and of his Christ!

II) What does Christian public engagement look like?

A) Loving our neighbors as ourselves

B) Being serious about it

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst...

Nor frenzied, but faithful: Blooming where you are planted

Conclusion/Observation: When we really care we are apt to fight with each other about the best way to do it. How do we navigate our differences when that happens? Stay tuned

Questions for Reflection this Week

- 1) Jesus promises to bless those who “hunger and thirst after righteousness” (Matthew 5:6). The word “righteousness” is a relational or covenantal term—which means that it does not have to do primarily with keeping an abstract standard but with approaching and living in faithful relationship with God. Why is it important to understand and to make this distinction?
- 2) The word “righteousness” means, among other things, “vindication”. Those who hunger and thirst after righteousness in this sense are those who long to hear God say to them, “Things are OK between us. You belong safely with me.” On what grounds is God able, without compromising his holiness, to say this to us—knowing what he knows about what is wrong with us? As you answer think about what Jesus said to John the Baptist when John at first refused to baptize him: “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15). (By choosing to be baptized as a sinner Jesus identified with us).
- 3) Because “righteousness” is a relational term, hungering and thirst for it means longing for God’s fellowship and his loving and holy rule over this world, beginning with our own hearts but extending beyond them. Read Jesus’ teaching on prayer in Matthew 6:5-13, and then read Jesus’ teaching on worry in Matthew 6:34 (noting especially v 33). How do we see the longing for righteousness reflected in Jesus’ teaching in both of these areas?
- 4) Read aloud Revelation 5:11-14 and Revelation 11:15, noting as you do that the scenes you find described there are not merely future, but have already begun (since Jesus has ascended to the right hand of God—Hebrews 1:1-3). What effect do these scenes have on you as you survey the present condition of our world and what you might do to address it in some way?
- 5) How might (should) hungering and thirsting for righteousness in the ways discussed in questions 1-3 above, affect not only what you do as a social activist but how you do it?
- 6) Jesus commands us in Matthew 22: 39 to “love our neighbor as yourself.” Think of three legitimate things or circumstances that are important to you (or that you wish you had). What would it look like for you to take action to bring those good things to a neighbor of yours—a spouse, a friend, a colleague, someone in a beat up part of the city, someone in a slum?
- 7) We must join Christ in “hungering and thirsting” for God’s holy love to settle on our planet. Give a grade to your level of “hungering.” If the grade is low, why is it?
- 8) Jesus no doubt felt the full weight of what was wrong with the world. But he did not rush about madly trying to fix things. He “bloomed where he was planted”—in the towns where God had placed him. Think of one simple way that you can bloom where you are planted.