

FEBRUARY STUDY

What Are
YOU
Hungry For?



When I chose the promise of God from Matthew 6 for this study, I had no idea the roller coaster upon which I was about to embark. Without putting a great deal of thought into it, I chose Matthew 6:25-34 because Jesus makes a powerful promise to provide for us in that passage. I had read that passage several times in my life. I had used it to calm myself down in times of anxiety or worry. I had even offered it to others, as a reminder that worrying is a dishonor to God because He promises to provide for us in Matthew 6.

However, in the context of writing an in-depth Bible Study around the passage, I found myself immediately faced with challenging questions: What about the Christians who starve to death? What about the perse-

cuted in Christ? What about those who are naked? What about? What about? What about? I was astounded and a little ashamed that I had never bothered to question my understanding of the passage before then.

These questions forced me to go on a journey to further understand this promise of God. I grappled with problems that theologians and philosophers have grappled with for centuries. I am certainly no expert, but in reading from and talking to the experts, I gained a deeper understanding of this promise.

Jesus is not promising to meet our physical needs. He is promising to provide the right amount of food and clothing we need in order to glorify Him. We are going to dive into Scripture to break this down and understand what it really means.



The Sermon on the Mount

First, it must be taken into consideration that this passage is just one part of an entire sermon that is one part of an entire Gospel. Matthew wrote his Gospel to document the coming of the promised Messiah. Matthew, more so than the other Gospel authors,

emphasizes Jesus' fulfillment of the Scriptures. Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount to a large crowd on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. The sermon is extensively documented in Matthew 5-7.

The central message of the Sermon on the Mount is how to live righteously in light of the

Gospel. It is relevant that Jesus spoke with authority, so much so that Matthew says the crowd was “astonished.”

The Sermon on the Mount begins in chapter 5 with a list of qualities and blessings we call the Beatitudes. Throughout the remainder of the sermon, Jesus gives several instructions that teach us how to exemplify those qualities listed in the Beatitudes.

In the passage we are studying, it seems like Jesus is promising to provide for our physical needs. However, he says in

6:25, “Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on.”

In the Beatitudes, Jesus says, “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.”

Doesn't it stand to reason Jesus is emphasizing that any hungering or thirsting should be after righteousness, and not after our physical needs? Remember the central message of the Sermon on the Mount is how to live righteously, not how to live comfortably.



Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness.

The thesis statement for the Sermon on the Mount is 6:33. It is notable that this verse begins with instructions. When we analyze this Scripture, the attention is already being drawn away from physical needs with this command. Jesus is telling us to not prioritize these earthly needs, but to place the highest priority on living righteously and seeking God's kingdom.

What is the Kingdom of God?

There are different schools of thought as to what exactly Jesus

meant when He referred to the Kingdom of God. He referenced it on several occasions and sometimes called it the Kingdom of Heaven rather than the Kingdom of God.

Some Christians believe it refers to a literal kingdom that Christ will set up on this earth in the end times, while others believe it is a more general term referring to the gospel and all that Jesus commands. Whichever interpretation is preferred, the point is not lost that we are told to seek after Godly things.

How must we seek the Kingdom of God?

We seek the Kingdom of God by repenting and believing and by hearing and doing. Jesus says in Matthew 7:13-14, "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."

One of the easiest truths to unpack in this entire sermon is this analogy that the way to enter the Kingdom is "narrow." This means that entering the Kingdom of Heaven is not an easy path. It will be a difficult path with fewer allies, but it will inevitably lead to life.

We Seek the Kingdom of God by Repenting and believing.

In Mark 1:15, Jesus tells us how to begin our spiritual journey to seeking the Kingdom, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel."

The emphasis of this verse is on *repenting* and *believing*. Then, you must have a persistent and constant prayer life and continue asking, seeking, and knocking for the rest of your life as Jesus instructs in Matthew 7:7, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

We Seek the Kingdom of God by hearing and doing.

In Matthew 7:21, Jesus states, "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." Then, in verse 24, He adds, "Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock."

The emphasis of both of these verses is *hearing* and *doing*. This means that in order to continue seeking the Kingdom of God, we must *hear* the Word and *follow* the Word. For even more detailed instructions on what we should be hearing and following, refer to the rest of the Sermon on the Mount...and the rest of the Bible.

In your life, what are some ways you have seen the path of righteousness to be difficult?

If you have already *repented* and *believed*, what are some specific ways you can continue *hearing* and *doing*?



And All These Things Shall be Added Unto You.

A paradox is a seemingly self-contradictory statement. During the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus presents what appears to be a contradiction, or a paradox. It seems as if He is promising us that if we “seek ye first the kingdom of God,” we will always be fed and clothed. However, we know from experience and observation this is not always true. Christians can starve. Christians can go naked. There are other instances in the Bible of a paradox between suffering and the promise of provision.

One example is in Philippians 4:11-13 and 19. Paul wrote this letter to the Philippians while he was in prison. He was giving them an update concerning his ministry and he included doctrinal teaching in the letter. He wrote, “Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I

know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in **all things** I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do **all things** through Christ which strengtheneth me.”

We can establish the fact that Paul had learned how to find contentment whether he was full or hungry. Then he continues in verse 19, “But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” The paradox is—if God can supply all of our needs, why do we need to learn contentment in **all things**, when we are full or when we are hungry?

Another text that seems to present a paradox is in Romans 8:32 and 36-37. “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us **all things**?” “As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the

day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay in **all these things** we are more than conquerors through him that loved us."

This text is an especially perplexing example. The paradox is—how can the author go from "freely give us **all things**" to "we are killed all the day long" to "in **all these things** we are more than conquerors."

The problem is not that the Word is contradictory or that Jesus is contradictory. The problem is that we do not understand the nature of "all these things." Our instructions from Jesus in Matthew 6 are to "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness." Our instruc-

tions from Paul in Philippians 4 are "to be content," "to know how to be abased, and...how to abound."

Romans 8 instructs that "we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." Remember that beatitude from Matthew 5? It says, "Blessed are they which hunger and thirst **after righteousness**: for they shall be filled." There is no paradox. "All these things" does not refer to food and clothes. We cannot be so concerned with the physical.

"All these things" is spiritual. "All these things" is whatever is necessary to glorify God. Jesus. Is. All. These. Things.

How can you be inspired by the life of Paul, who faced numerous challenges, but managed to remain content?

How can you shift your mindset away from seeking physical needs and more focused on seeking God's Kingdom?

God's promise to meet our needs does not mean providing the food and clothing we think we need. Everything will be given to us that we need in order to glorify God most fully.

I would like to borrow an analogy I came across while reading Lee Strobel's *The Case for Faith*. In an interview with Peter John Kreeft, PH.D., Strobel and Kreeft discussed the problem of evil and suffering existing alongside a loving God. Kreeft explained how we withdraw protection from our children all the time in order to allow them to learn. His specific example was watching his daughter learn to thread a needle. She stuck herself in the finger a couple of times and bled, but her father allowed her to work through the struggle until she was successful. While his first instinct was to do it for her to protect her from bleeding, he held back. After she struggled with the task for some time, she proudly exclaimed that she did it by herself! The pain was long forgotten in the triumph of her success.

Another analogy came to me recently. I learned the importance of a baby bird breaking its own shell as it emerges from its egg. While this task is challenging and arduous for the baby bird, it is not optional. The bird is equipped with a special "egg tooth" specifically for breaking its shell. Even though it is a challenge, the struggle is necessary because the baby bird needs that stress in order to strengthen its muscles. If someone were to help the baby break its shell, it would not survive because it would have missed a necessary step in development.

There are any number of reasons that we might need to go hungry or naked. Sometimes it might be a consequence or a result of evil. Sometimes it might be for our sake. Sometimes it might be for the sake of witnessing. However, it is always for the glory of God. And frankly—it's not our business why it happens. God is the Supreme Ruler, the ultimate Authority. Jesus is not promising to meet our physical needs. He is promising that we will have the right amount of food and clothing in order to



glorify Him. Our greatest need, in fact, is to glorify Him. His glory matters far more than our physical needs.

Let me leave you with an encouraging reminder. The little girl in the analogy was equipped to learn how to sew. She had a needle, thread, and determination. The baby bird is equipped with an “egg tooth” to break out of its shell. We, also, are equipped for our mission to seek the Kingdom.

Although the road will be narrow, we might go hungry, and we might even die, we are equipped with the Word of God and His promise to help us. Let’s go back again to Matthew 7:14, where Jesus says, “Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” This world is not our home. We are not finished. We get life everlasting.

Once our time on earth is done, we can look forward to the hope of heaven. We will get a new body. At that time, we will truly receive all these things.

Think of a time when you faced a challenge. How did it help you grow? How did it encourage you to witness?

What did your struggle do to further God’s Kingdom?

How can you encourage friends who are facing difficult times? 

About the Writer: Rachel (Munsey) Jackson lives in Nashville, Tennessee, with her husband of six years and her three cats. She grew up in a missionary family ministering to the people of Mexico and developed a strong faith from an early age. She loves teaching second grade English learners in Nashville. She faithfully serves with her husband, Matt, at The Grove Free Will Baptist Church in Smyrna.