

Blessed Desire for Righteousness

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[0 : 0 0] Well, go with me again to the Beatitudes in Matthew chapter 5. Matthew chapter 5. Today we'll focus on verse 6, but I'll again read the fuller passage, starting at verse 1.

Seeing the crowds, Jesus went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

[1 : 1 4] Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven. For so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Verse 6, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, speaks of a base desire.

It's an instinctive craving. It's something that drives a person, naturally pushing them in a particular direction. Now I think we all understand what it means to be hungry or to be thirsty.

If one gets hungry enough, he'll not only crave something to eat, but he just may become so desperate that he'll do just about anything to get something to eat.

I remember reading a story years ago of a man who was stranded and so destitute of food that he actually ate his own leg. He was willing to inflict great pain on himself because his desire to fill his belly was so strong, he couldn't think of anything else.

Obviously, Jesus is speaking metaphorically here. He's not talking about physical hunger and thirst. He's simply talking about what people want the most.

[2 : 3 4] He's talking about our strongest desires. He's talking about what moves us, what propels us. He's essentially talking about ambition. What is our ambition?

Now as you know, we are studying the paradoxical life of living within God's kingdom, of citizens of God's kingdom. Specifically, we hope to learn how to live distinctly as citizens of his kingdom.

Suffice it to say, God's wisdom is unconventional wisdom according to the world. Much of it doesn't make sense, which is vividly illustrated here in the Beatitudes.

Jesus goes as far as to say, Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. Happy are those who are persecuted.

Needless to say, the unbeliever can't really make sense of this. This seemingly upside-down nature of God's kingdom leaves us with a stark contrast between the worldviews and the philosophies and the beliefs and the lifestyles of God's people and everyone else.

[3 : 45] It's a drastic difference. And at the heart of things, we have very different ambitions. Very different ambitions.

Now I'll confess to you that I have a guilty pleasure of reading biographies and autobiographies and memoirs of famous musicians.

Now I probably don't have to tell you that most secular musicians have not led the most upstanding righteous lives. But I enjoy reading about how the music was made and how they wrote their songs and what was going on in their lives to inspire them to write those songs and what did the recording process look like and why did their music change over the years and so on.

Now I don't know how many of these books I've actually read, but most of them share a very common theme from one to the next. You've got a young, talented musician who wants to pursue a career in music and most of them, they work really hard to achieve it.

They do things that most of us would probably not want to do because they assume a career in music will be the most fulfilling thing they can possibly do with their lives.

[5 : 02] Most of them have that in their minds and it's very clear from the start if they want fulfillment, if they want satisfaction, they must pursue a career in music.

They are almost always motivated by the promise of a better life. If only their music will grant them a measure of fame and fortune and consequently freedom.

That's what a lot of these guys are looking for. They just want the freedom that comes with it. And yet rarely does it work out that way.

In the vast majority of these stories that I've read, as fame and fortune increase, so does misery. As it happens, worldly success doesn't lead to the happiness they anticipated.

As you probably know, many of their stories actually end with depression and drug use and overdoses and suicide and all kinds of sad and tragic ends.

[6 : 12] Sadly though, this doesn't stop particularly young people from looking at celebrities on TV and on Instagram and thinking to themselves, yeah, that's the life I want.

I'd love to be rich and famous because wouldn't that just take care of all of my problems? It doesn't stop older people from maybe wishing for the same thing or thinking that a little more money or a slightly better job would make them happier.

Well, how many celebrity stories of self-destruction do we need to realize that maybe, just maybe, God knows better than us. Maybe His way is the way to happiness.

Maybe the world is wrong after all. Matthew 5, 6 confronts us with a very basic question. What is our ambition? What drives us?

What do we want more than anything? Are we driven to gratify our lusts or satisfy our egos? How did that work out for Adam and Eve?

[7 : 23] Consider Lucifer in Isaiah 14. He said in his heart, I will ascend to heaven above the stars of God. I will set my throne on high.

I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will make myself like the Most High.

Now, obviously, his ambition was not to glorify God. More than anything, he desired to glorify himself, to lift himself up. He wanted to make himself like the Most High.

And how does God respond? But you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit. This is what happens when we follow the world's version of wisdom.

We think we can find fulfillment in it. We think our lives will be better. We think we'll be happy. But it doesn't work out that way. Instead, like so many famous musicians, we find ourselves at the bottom.

- [8 : 29] We think we'll reach the top, but we find ourselves at the bottom, maybe falling much further than where we started. We need to remember that when we compare God's wisdom with worldly wisdom, we are not comparing two competing yet equal ideas.
- God created this world. God created this world. He designed it with a purpose, and it functions the way He intended. And what I mean by that is if we attempt to live in a way that is contrary to what He intended, what we're really doing is swimming upstream.
- We're violating the laws of nature itself. Only God can determine what is good. And the wise person will say, yes, Lord, when you say it is good, it must be good.
- And that is the way I will go. Another example of what not to do is King Nebuchadnezzar. In Daniel chapter 4, Nebuchadnezzar is standing on the roof of his palace, and he says, is this not the great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence, and for the glory of my majesty?
- He thought he was having a good day. Just as Lucifer was driven by a desire for power, Nebuchadnezzar is driven by a desire for praise, I suppose.
- [10 : 05] But notice how God responds. While the words were still in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken, the kingdom has departed from you.
- And you will be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time shall pass over you until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.
- Immediately, the word was fulfilled against Nebuchadnezzar. Again, the outcome is not what Nebuchadnezzar anticipated. It's not what he thought it would be.
- I'll provide one more example. Jesus tells the parable of a wealthy farmer with so much abundance that he didn't have a place to store everything. Good problem to have, most of us would think.
- So he makes plans to build bigger barns, bigger storehouses. And then he says to himself, you know what, you have ample goods laid up for many years. Relax, eat, drink, be merry.
- [11 : 19] As far as he's concerned, he's set for the rest of his life. He'll have nothing but ease, nothing but pleasure for the remainder of his days. But God said to him, fool, fool.
- This night, your soul is required of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be? Jesus then concludes the parable this way.
- So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God. Lucifer hungered for power.
- We've got Nebuchadnezzar. He hungered for praise. The wealthy farmer hungered for pleasure, I suppose. And because they hungered, hungered for the wrong things, rejecting God's good things, they lost everything.
- They lost everything. The only pursuit that can lead to true and lasting happiness is the pursuit of righteousness. Blessed or happy are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.
- [12 : 31] Jesus says that's the way to happiness. The pursuit of righteousness should be the thing that ultimately drives us. I think we can all appreciate his analogy here because we all know what it's like to hunger and thirst, don't we?
- It's a compelling analogy because hunger and thirst necessarily mean we haven't had enough. We need a little bit more. If we are hungry or thirsty enough, we could become like the man who ate his own leg.

There's desperation implied in it. The food and water we seek aren't just necessary for survival. If we are truly hungry and thirsty, we won't be able to think about anything else.

Just ask my two-year-old son. There's a term for that, hangry. Now, the most obvious point Jesus is making here is that righteousness is just as much of a spiritual necessity as food and water are physical necessities.

We can't live without food and water. I don't need to tell anyone that, right? Well, we can't live spiritually without righteousness. About 400 years before Christ, Rome experienced a severe famine and it got so bad that thousands of people drowned themselves in the river rather than starved to death.

[14 : 05] I can hardly imagine that. But it shows how desperate one can become when he lacks food. The starving person's mind becomes so utterly consumed by a passion for food that he would rather, in some cases anyway, kill himself than live another minute without eating.

The question is, do we crave the righteousness of God as much as physical food or anything else the world has to offer?

We should because we can literally, physically, eat to the full every day of our lives. But you know what still comes? Eventually? Death.

That food won't sustain you forever. And then what? Then the only thing that will matter is not bread in our bellies, but the righteousness of God.

In Isaiah 55, verse 2, God himself asked, why do you spend your money for that which is not bread and your labor for that which does not satisfy? In other words, what's the point?

[15 : 22] Why invest in something temporal? Why invest in something that is ultimately unable to satisfy? Jeremiah says, the people have forsaken God, the fountain of living waters, and have hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

Again, what's the point? We put so much time and effort for things that can't last. that can't satisfy for things that certainly can't save us.

in 1 John 2.15-17, John writes, do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

For all that is in the world, the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the pride of life is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires.

But whoever does the will of God abides forever. Now, it may defy the world's conventional wisdom, but if we are seeking satisfaction in anything other than God alone, we have missed the mark terribly.

[16 : 43] And severe disappointment is all that awaits. Looking back over the preceding Beatitudes, you'll notice that the first three verses were essentially negative.

To be poor in spirit means we turn away from self-seeking. In mourning, we turn away from self-satisfaction. And in meekness, we turn away from self-serving.

All three are costly and seemingly painful, at least in the moment. We must die to self. We must confess our sinfulness.

We must surrender ourselves to God's control. This fourth beatitude, however, is a little more on the positive side. Once we have put aside self, we've put aside sin, we've put aside our own power, if you will, turning to the Lord, a desire for righteousness grows within us.

The more we put aside what we have, the more we long for what God gives. Listen to what Martin Lloyd-Jones says. This beatitude again follows logically from the previous ones.

[17 : 58] It is a statement to which all the others lead. It is the logical conclusion to which they come, and it is something for which we should all be profoundly thankful and grateful to God. I do not know of a better test that anyone can apply to himself or herself in this whole matter of the Christian profession than a verse like this one.

If this verse is to you one of the most blessed statements of the whole of Scripture, you can be quite certain you are a Christian. If it is not, then you had better examine the foundations again.

I only wish I could say that with a British accent. It's more compelling. But regardless, that can be a quite convicting statement.

One of the characteristics that makes citizens of God's kingdom distinct from the unbelieving, unredeemed world is a hunger and a thirst for righteousness.

To have God's life within us through the new birth is a desire of more of his likeness within us by growing in righteousness.

[19 : 09] The believer will of course wrestle in the flesh, but his most sincere desire is to grow in the Lord and to obey him. Jesus describes a hunger and thirst that is intense and unquenchable.

He uses the, what we call the present participle here. So, he's signifying a continuous longing, a continuous seeking. He's talking about hunger and thirst that is perpetual, it's insatiable.

It's a longing for holiness that is deep and unending. Think of Moses in the book of Exodus. God appeared to Moses one way or another, spoke to him time and time again, yet Moses, he couldn't get enough.

In Exodus 33, we're told, verse 9, when Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent and the Lord would speak with Moses. And when all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise up and worship each at his tent door.

Thus, the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face as a man speaks to his friend. God would speak regularly to Moses as with a friend.

[20 : 26] What more could Moses want? And yet, Moses begged for more of God's presence. He wants more of God. And the Lord said to Moses, this very thing that you have spoken, I will do.

For you have found favor in my sight and I know you by name. Then Moses said, please, show me your glory. Show me your glory.

Even after all of those encounters with God, amazing, amazing encounters with God, Moses wanted more. And for that, we're told, Moses found favor in God's sight.

In Psalm 63, David writes, O God, you are my God. Earnestly, earnestly, I seek you. My soul thirsts for you.

My flesh faints for you as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. David's longing for God perfectly captures the fundamental desire of citizens of God's kingdom.

[21 : 32] The Apostle Paul, he had visions of God and incredible revelations. Yet he says, in Philippians 3.10, he still longed to know Him and the power of His resurrection and to share in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death.

He wanted more. More of God. Peter longed to grow in the grace and the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

John Darby was a 19th century English preacher and though I don't agree with all of his theology, he was certainly right when he wrote, to be hungry is not enough. I must be really starving to know what is in God's heart toward me.

When the prodigal son was hungry, he went to feed on the husks. But when he was starving, he turned to his father. That's the kind of hunger Jesus is describing here.

It's a hunger that only God can satisfy. This is one of the things that makes this Sunday school lesson, this series, so important to us.

[22 : 48] We are talking about living distinctly as citizens of God's kingdom. That is, Christians should be starkly different than the world and to be clear, we're not to be different for the sake of being different.

Some people have that mentality. We're just supposed to be different. Whatever the crowd's doing, we're going to do the opposite. No, we're different because we're different.

We have a new nature in Christ, right? A goat is not a sheep and a sheep is not a goat. They are different creatures with different natures and they will inevitably behave according to their natures.

Now, there are a lot of professing Christians who like to pick and choose which parts of the Bible they want to believe, which parts they want to follow. You know, God is love, they say, but they disregard His holiness.

God is serious about this sin, but He's not probably too concerned about this one. I've lost count of the number of times I've heard someone say to me, I'm a Christian, but I'm not religious and they will often follow that up if I can summarize what they try to express to me.

[24 : 00] Something like, I prefer to serve God on my own, in my own way. Well, anyone who has honestly read the Bible knows that that cannot be.

That's not possible. We can't dictate to God how we will serve Him. We can't pick and choose what we want from the Bible. Righteousness is not for nibbling.

It's for hungry. It's for thirsting after. According to Christ, citizens of His kingdom will continually hunger and thirst for righteousness.

That will be their foremost ambition in this life. They will crave it. They will want nothing else if given a choice. They will not be satisfied with anything less than the righteousness of God.

But practically speaking, what exactly does that mean? What does it mean to hunger and thirst for righteousness? And I believe there are two possible answers depending on whom we're talking about.

[25 : 08] One aspect of this hunger and thirst actually leads people into the kingdom. And then we've got another aspect that leads citizens of the kingdom into increased sanctification.

So let's consider both. Later in this sermon, Jesus says, I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Now for those in the audience, he might as well have said, I'm sorry folks, but you will never enter the kingdom. No one had the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees.

Yet Jesus says one's righteousness must exceed their righteousness in order to enter the kingdom. What was he trying to tell them? Surely he wasn't suggesting entrance into the kingdom is impossible, was he?

Well, no, and yes. Quoting the Psalms, Paul says, none is righteous. No, not one.

[26 : 27] None is righteous. So on the one hand, sinners can never meet God's standard of righteousness. We have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

On our own, we can never enter the kingdom. We can never be saved. It's impossible for us. Absolutely, positively, impossible. On the other hand, Jesus was once asked, who can be saved?

And he answered, what is impossible with man is possible with God. That's Luke 18, 27.

In other words, it is impossible for man to enter the kingdom on its own. But God has graciously provided a way. Paul says, in Romans 1, for I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek, for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith as it is written, the righteous shall live by faith.

In Isaiah 51, verse 5, God says, my righteousness draws near, my salvation has gone out. What is impossible with man is possible with God.

[27 : 56] By his mercy, God has provided a way into his kingdom. What is that way? In a word, it's faith. It's faith.

It's not, I'll keep the law and be saved. It's not confidence in self. It's not confidence in one's own morality. It's not confidence in one's own righteousness because none is righteous.

No, not one. It's faith. It's when a sinner abandons every thought of saving himself instead he trusts in Christ alone to save him.

2 Corinthians 5, 21, for our sake, God made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become what? The righteousness of God.

Do you see how our very entrance into the kingdom then requires a hunger and a thirst for righteousness? Namely, the righteousness of God?

[29 : 02] It's a craving really for Christ himself. Only after we've come to our wits end and realize that we have no hope outside of Christ. It is only after Christ becomes our primary ambition that we can enter into his kingdom.

It is by faith alone in Christ alone. Now for those who are already in the kingdom those who are already saved our object of hungering and thirsting actually remains Christ.

It remains Christ but we're not seeking salvation. We're not seeking entrance into the kingdom. We're already in the kingdom. What we're seeking is growth. We hunger and thirst to grow in righteousness.

Our ambition is to become increasingly conformed to the image of Christ. Now keep in mind we're not perfect and we won't be perfect until we reach heaven.

Paul's prayer for the believers in Philippi was that their love would abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment so that you may approve what is excellent and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

[30 : 24] Now you'll notice that even in our sanctification the righteousness we seek comes from Jesus Christ. Comes from God not us.

That's why Jesus uses the definite article in Matthew 5-6. It's not in our English translations most of them anyway but the verse could read blessed are those who hunger and thirst for the righteousness.

Not just any righteousness the righteousness that is the righteousness of God. We're seeking his righteousness. Now when you think about it this really falls right in line with the other beatitudes humility mourning meekness in short citizens of God's kingdom are selfless completely selfless we're not consumed with self we're not self absorbed we're not proud we're like John the Baptist who said of Christ he must increase but I must decrease citizens of the kingdom think like Paul who said for from him and through him and to him are all things to him be glory forever amen now let's turn our attention to the latter part of this verse what is the promise to those who hunger and thirst for righteousness Jesus says they shall be satisfied now there's kind of a fascinating paradox in this verse because Jesus says God's people will continually hunger and thirst their appetites are insatiable with every bite they just want a little more it seems that satisfaction is always just out of reach they can never get quite enough the more they eat the more they drink the more they want yet Jesus also says they shall be satisfied how can that be how could we be satisfied yet always hunger and thirst for more well I believe the simplest explanation is that

Jesus is speaking chronologically we hunger and thirst now and while we may experience a degree of satisfaction we certainly do we can't be fully satisfied not just yet full satisfaction comes later and why can't we be fully satisfied now because the perfect has not yet come we live in a fallen world at the start of second Corinthians five Paul writes for we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed we have a building from God a house not made with hands eternal in the heavens for in this tent in this flesh in this world we we groan longing to put on our heavenly dwelling if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked for while we are still in this tent we groan being burdened not that we would be unclothed but that we would be further clothed so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life

Paul speaks again of this groaning in Romans 8 he says for we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now and not only the creation but we ourselves who have the first fruits of the spirit groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons the redemption of our bodies so if nothing else we can clearly sense the dissatisfaction expressed through this groaning this internal groaning we can't be fully satisfied now not with sin and not with sin's consequences still present that is why Paul told the Philippians for me to live is Christ but to die is gain in Philippians Paul makes it clear that he's content he's satisfied to some degree to remain on this earth for as long as God wants him here whether he's rich or poor living in peace or suffering filled or hungry he's satisfied to some degree he says in chapter four

[34 : 49] I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content I know how to be brought low and I know how to abound in any in every circumstance I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger abundance and need I can do all things through him who strengthens me yet he still says to die is gain as I often point out to people at the funeral home what you may have heard is to live is gain somehow it gets mixed up in our heads that's what we naturally hear some people seem to hear Paul saying to live is gain but to die well okay at least I get Christ that's not what Paul said he says for me to live is Christ and to die is gain he continues I am hard pressed between the two my desire is to depart and be with Christ for that is far better but to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account so

Paul is content here in this life he's content but he anticipates something even better down the road in the future whatever satisfaction we have now is always going to be hindered by sin and this groaning that Paul described true full lasting satisfaction that comes later Jeremiah 31 verse 14 says my people shall be satisfied with my goodness declares the Lord Jesus said I am the bread of life whoever comes to me shall not hunger and whoever believes in me shall never thirst so whatever degree of satisfaction we can have now living within God's kingdom that's just a small taste of what's to come recently Danae and I spent a few days at an all inclusive resort in Mexico and it was great we could eat whatever we wanted and we could order pretty much anything any time of the day get hungry get a craving in the middle of night call room service they'll bring it to you if I wanted a steak

I could have a steak we wanted a fruit smoothie we'd have a fruit smoothie and so on all things considered wasn't much room to complain except everything we ate or drank in that country had a funny aftertaste to me and the weird part was everything had the same aftertaste whether I was eating a smoothie or drinking a smoothie or eating a steak it all just kind of had the same aftertaste so by the end of the trip we were kind of craving American food again in fact we couldn't think of anything else when we were leaving the resort than when we had our layover in Charlotte we could go get some Bojangles biscuits we could eat anything we wanted at this resort and that's what we craved by the end we wanted some biscuits maybe that's not the best illustration but you probably understand my point the Christian we can be satisfied now we can be overjoyed with what we have we can be content but it simply doesn't compare with the satisfaction that's to come now briefly

I want to back up and talk about what hungering and thirsting looks like give you just a few things to consider what does it mean to hunger and thirst for righteousness first of all it is dissatisfaction with self dissatisfaction with self if one is satisfied in and of himself he'll have no reason to seek God's righteousness as Thomas Watson once said he has most need of righteousness that least wants it the truly hungering Christian will say wretched man that I am who will save me from this body of death of course this is a clear distinction from citizens of the devil's kingdom the world says believe in yourself believe in yourself be happy with who you are not long ago I heard that old Whitney Houston song the greatest love of all according to Whitney Houston what's the greatest love of all not that someone lays down his life for a friend as the

Bible says no she says no matter what they take from me they can't take away my dignity because the greatest love of all is happening to me I found the greatest love of all inside of me the greatest love of all is easy to achieve learning to love yourself is the greatest love of all that is distinctly unbiblical and frankly dangerous even when it's sung with a beautiful voice second hungering and thirsting in this context is freedom from dependence on external things for satisfaction that's not where we're trying to find satisfaction it doesn't look for satisfaction in money or houses or careers or cars it is satisfaction in spiritual everlasting things things of God heavenly things third it craves the word of God it craves the word of

[40 : 23] God the prophet Jeremiah said your words were found and I ate them and your words became to me a joy and a delight in my heart if we seek God's righteousness we will seek his word fourth it is content with God's will quoting Thomas Watson once again he said the one who hungers and thirsts after righteousness can feed on the myrrh or bitter of the gospel as well as the honey as you've probably learned by now life in the kingdom isn't always easy but citizens of the kingdom will accept God's will for better or worse fifth true spiritual hunger is unconditional what do I mean by that I was talking to a man just the other day who's having a rough go of things recently he lost his job money's very tight and he mentioned a few other problems that he was experiencing and at one point

I asked him are you a praying man he said I pray all the time but it hasn't done much good he said I'm always telling God that if he helps me out with this problem or that I'll gladly give to charity I'll go to church I'll do whatever he wants but he doesn't seem to answer now do you see the problem with his approach more importantly do you see the problem with his primary desire what does he really want he isn't hungering for God's righteousness he isn't hungering for God he's hungering for a job he's hungering for more money worse yet he's demanding that God give him a job or give him more money before he's willing to even consider doing anything that would please God citizens of God's kingdom do not want God plus money they do not want

God plus anything else they want him they want Christ they want God's righteousness as we read in Isaiah 26 9 they confess my soul yearns for you in the night my spirit within me earnestly seeks that that that is a citizen of God's kingdom we're dismissed aris you we you we we we