

June 7, 2015

Matthew 5:1-12

What's the one thing you would like to have more than anything else in the whole world? Is it righteousness? *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied!*

BLESSEDNESS

Blessedness, or, happiness is said to be like sunshine. They who bring sunshine into the lives of others cannot keep it from themselves. Greta Palmer once said that happiness is a by-product of an effort to make someone else happy. So bringing light into the lives of others would likewise brighten our own lives. Expanding on the idea of happiness as a by-product, it becomes possible to say that happiness is like warmth. By bringing warmth into the lives of others, you cannot help but become warmer yourself. And remember, Charlie Brown says that happiness is a warm puppy. It's also possible to say that happiness is like peace, or, kindness, or, love: by bringing such things into the lives of others, you cannot keep them from yourself. And to tie this idea into today's theme, perhaps, happiness is also like wholeness; the more you work to bring wholeness to others, the more it is likely to rub off on you.

THEY SHALL BE SATISFIED

Wholeness. The word "*satisfied*," in this passage means, whole, or, complete. It does not mean satisfactory, as in just-getting-by. To be truly satisfied means to fulfill a potential. Satisfaction for a cup would be to be full. In human terms, satisfaction would be the quality that would make you more fully able to be yourself, what God made you to be. Of course, for people, we can almost never know final satisfaction. Human nature is such that once we have acquired our potential, it almost always seems that some new horizon opens up to us. We *can* find a brief moment of satisfaction, but once we've achieved one goal, another looms up before us. We are able to grow constantly. And the moment we stop growing, we start dying.

They shall be satisfied. What is it that gives satisfaction? Real satisfaction? That feeling of being complete? For some, it might be a sort of conquest, reaching the highest high, catching the biggest fish. For others it might be just being on the mountainside, or, just being on the river. Realize, however, that this satisfaction is still only temporary. And realize, too, that this Beatitude promises satisfaction not for the righteous, but for those who hunger and thirst for it!

So what makes us feel satisfied? What is there that gives us a sense of soundness and integrity? Can our life ever come to know that feeling of entirety? Of being all together? Or, will there always seem to be another piece of the puzzle to put into place

THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST

The requirement Jesus poses for this blessing of satisfaction is not the attainment of righteousness, as I have said, but the hunger and thirst for it. But it's not just the good intention that counts, for intent breeds action. It's the sense of commitment, the depth of desire that reveals an intensity that could only be described as a hunger, a thirst.

And our souls are starving. How do we feed them? Our spirits languish with thirst? What can refresh them? We need the bread of faith, the cup of goodness. Jesus offers His blessing to those who long for righteousness as much as a starving person longs for food, or, as much as a thirsty person longs for water.

The image of hungering and thirsting for God in this Beatitude is not new. Psalm 42:1-2 says, *“As a hart longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for Thee, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.”* Psalm 63:1 – *“O God, Thou art my God, I seek Thee. My soul thirsts for Thee; my flesh faints for Thee as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.”*

Realize that hunger and thirst are a threat to life. So likewise, the spiritually empty and dry will perish eternally. But Jesus promises their fullness if only they know their true hunger, if only they know their true thirst. If you desire something enough, you will get it. This Beatitude makes that promise. You will persevere until you find it. You will persist until you have it. And you will sacrifice everything just to ease your hunger, to quench your thirst.

Realize too, that each one of us suffers some kind of emotional or spiritual hunger and thirst. We constantly want something more. Something is missing in our lives. Often we don't really know what it is. But that hunger leaves us weak. We often don't know how weak we really are. We're ready to try anything. We're like the person getting up in the middle of the night, not knowing what to have, but wanting something, anything. They go to the refrigerator and nibble at this, they try that, and nothing really satisfies. Sometimes they eat until they are sick.

And that's the state of our world today. People have tried just about everything to find satisfaction, and society is sick. And that sickness makes us even more desperate. We hunger and thirst for all the wrong things and still we are empty. And in that emptiness, our children turn to drugs, to crime, to immoral pleasures that only leave them emptier, until, at times, the only way out of the desolation of their emptiness seems to be death.

Suicide among youth in the USA occurs at the incredible rate of an average of about one every 13 minutes! In 2013 (the most recent year for which full data are available), 41,149 suicides were reported, making suicide the 10th leading cause of death for Americans. In that year, someone in the country died by suicide every 12.8 minutes. (American Foundation for Suicide Prevention) And for every suicide, there are about 100 attempts at suicide. Why? Because they're hungry, they're thirsting for something. Something more. And they just can't find it. And the last place they seem to want to look is the Church. The Church has not satisfied them. But it could.

I believe with all my heart that the Church has the answer. Because the answer is Jesus Christ, and, the Kingdom of God! And until we, as the Church, begin to live with the conviction that we truly wanted eternal life as much as a starving person wants food, or, as much as one dying of thirst wants water, there will only remain a vacant emptiness for our young people. Another part of the problem is that modern society has become so geared to instant gratification.... Push a button, there's your need. Fast food! Instant millions! Automatic everything. Credit cards – buy now, pay later. And our young people don't really learn the true value of things... that many of us have even forgotten the value of faith. What is faith in these modern times? It only seems like something old fashioned. It's not cool. But the Kingdom of God, though it may not sound cool now, this very instant, is the coolest. Just like the mountain top, though, we need to climb, to study, to learn what it means to be faithful. You see, faith should never be a matter of just interest and attraction, but a hungry craving, a driving thirst. The

Christian does not say, "I am interested in Christ," but, "*For me to live is Christ!*" (Philippians 1:21) The Christian does not say, "I would like an arrangement with Christ," but "I surrender my life to Christ." I surrender my life to Christ!

RIGHTEOUSNESS

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness! This is the most demanding of all Beatitudes, but also the kindest and most encouraging. Blessedness is not a promise to those who only want to live their own lives and do no harm. It is for those who desire righteousness as a matter of life and death.

In the novel *Quo Vadis*, there is a picture of a young Roman called Vicinius. He is in love with a Christian girl, but because he is a pagan she will not return his love. Without her knowledge, he followed her to the little secret gathering of the Christians, and there he heard Peter preach. As he listened, something happened within him. He knew that Jesus Christ was the most important reality in life, but, "He felt that, if he wished to follow His teaching, he would have to place on a burning pile all his thoughts, habits, and character; his whole nature up to that very moment, burn them into ashes, and then fill himself with a life altogether different, and, an entirely new soul." Right then and there, he made a decision.

Vicinius may not have known it, but at that very moment, at the very beginning of his turning, he became blessed. He was blessed because the promise of being satisfied is not for those who have attained righteousness, but for those who hunger and thirst for it...fFor those who hunger and thirst for justice, knowing that a personal vindication is not enough, not the end of the story, but the beginning. Because the blessed mournful in the second Beatitude will return even after we feel our acceptability before God, and our hunger, our thirst, the cause we will want to fight for, will be a total righteousness, the righteousness of all. This will include willing not only a sense of fairness to evolve in a world where the many have too little and the few have too much; but the universal love of God, obedience to God's Kingdom, and a renewal within every heart of the Image and Likeness that exists in our human potential! That has always been what I have hoped I could accomplish – a world that is full of love, or Kingdom people who seek righteousness and goodness in this world.

Righteousness – the likeness of God. Righteousness – being set right with God. Righteousness – being set right with the Kingdom of God. Righteousness is Kingdom living. This Beatitude is saying, "Blessed are those whose most intense desire is to enter into a right relationship with God."

And what is your heart's desire?

GOODNESS

Righteousness is one more thing. It is goodness. What if goodness had to be bought? And what if its price was the cost of a meal? And you had to hunger and thirst for it? Where would it be in these modern times? With our abundance, how incredibly taken for granted it would become! How forfeitable it would seem! And how desolate this world would be. Thank God, it's free. It is given to us abundantly. It's a part of our nature. It's within us like a spark just waiting to burst into flames.

Goodness. Make it your vision. Make it the subject of your daydreams. Make it your fantasy. Through each one of us, goodness can be more than just something hoped for in the future. Make goodness a possibility. Make it a responsibility!

Too many “good” people are not hungry and thirsty enough. They don’t seek any real righteousness. If they did, the systematic sin and corruption of pornography, prostitution, promiscuity, drug dealing, gambling, violence, racism, and that unending list of social evils perpetuated by people lost and gone astray who claim their “right” to the pursuit of some sickened sense of happiness, would have been crushed long ago. If we did seek righteousness more seriously, then what should we be doing to stop the onslaught of pornographic materials where distortions of God’s good gift of sexuality systematically pervert the minds of both young and old all around us? Drugs? Gambling? We’re not even talking about such issues. We’re detached!

But feel that hunger welling up inside you. Taste the dryness you sense in your thirst for goodness. As you listen to these issues, feel it for God’s sake! Feel it for righteousness’ sake! Feel it, and crave for the goodness we so desperately lack. Jesus has promised that you we will be satisfied!

The Apostle Paul, in his Letter to the Philippians decried many of the wonderful accomplishments he had gained. “More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord....” Philippians 3:8-14 ... He kept hungering and thirsting. He kept striving. He pressed on...to more.

SATISFIED

This Beatitude is the key to the whole Sermon on the Mount. Jesus’ whole message is concerned with the state of being faithful, more so than looking faithful. It is concerned with the spirit of the law as much as the letter of the law. It is concerned with the inward witness as much as the outward ritual. Faith must be internalized. We should keep rules because we believe in them, not just because we fear punishment. We should be righteous, not only for what it will do for us, but for what our example can do for others. If only we revealed our hunger, our thirst for righteousness, maybe, just maybe our children might crave goodness instead of what only feels good at that moment.

And we’re all thirsty. Before us lay an ocean of water. But we soon learn that if we drink salt water, the thirst remains. It grows. We need to search inland for the pure spring that truly quenches. That salt water may look like the right stuff, but it’s only the purer water that wells up from wonderful depths that saves us. And there’s a well, a fountain of life that’s been revealed. It’s just waiting to be tapped. And it’s here in our midst. It’s here in our fellowship. It’s in the background of the message of the Bible. It’s here in the hymnal. And it’s here in our beliefs. It’s a Kingdom, and it’s love.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. The curse is “not wanting,” not desiring, not searching for something more. Tom Landry, who used to coach of the Dallas Cowboys, has said: “The quality of a person’s life is in direct proportion to their commitment to excellence.” Commitment. Hunger, thirst. Commitment to excellence, to goodness, to complete goodness, perfect goodness. It’s a commitment to this that satisfies.

Robert Louis Stevenson said that “to travel hopefully is better than to arrive.” Hunger and thirst is better than the attainment of righteousness. And those who travel the road of commitment, and especially commitment to Christ, travel hopefully, and, ... they arrive.

What’s your greatest hunger? What’s your greatest thirst? What’s the one thing you’d like to have more than anything else in the whole world? Is it righteousness? You shall be satisfied! You are blessed!