

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

Let's turn to Matthew 5, and spend some time thinking about verse 6.

Matthew 5:6 (ESV) – 6 “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”

Satisfaction eludes us, doesn't it? It's rare that anything is exactly right, no matter what it is. The most common form of media in our world is advertising, all of which is aimed at highlighting your dissatisfaction with something, and offering you a solution. Politics runs on the same principle – “this thing is bad; vote for me and I'll change it!” Romance novels promise a fantasy relationship with all of the thrills and none of the problems of real life. The company MarketWatch conducted a series of interviews with both financial experts and happiness gurus in 2016, and identified seven reasons for unhappiness: not having enough money, a significant increase in prescription medications, too much time spent with smartphones and other gadgets, stress, jealousy over those who seem to have more, a forty-hour work week, and being physically unhealthy. Just this morning I read a headline that said the key to happiness is spontaneity – just do what you want right now, without thinking about it.

There are two underlying messages of all of these studies. First, the experience of happiness now is what matters, not what might come in the future as a result. And second, true satisfaction is so temporary, so brief, that there is no such thing as lasting satisfaction.

TRANSITION: But Jesus tells us that there is such a thing as lasting, eternal satisfaction. Let's look at Matthew 5:6.

HUNGERING AND THIRSTING

Matthew 5:6 (ESV) – 6 “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS?

It means to have a deep desire both for personal righteousness.

PERSONAL RIGHTEOUSNESS IS NOT SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS

Personal righteousness is not self-righteousness. The Pharisees had that by the ton, and it only cursed them. Personal righteousness is being filled with God's righteousness, rather than trying to achieve it on your own. When Jesus says "they shall be filled," it is in the passive voice; righteousness is something we receive, not something we achieve. It's very clear that Jesus did not say, "Blessed are those who achieve righteousness," but "blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." If you and I had it on our own, we wouldn't hunger and thirst for it.

HUNGER AND THIRST MEANS A STRONG DESIRE TO LIVE AS GOD WANTS US TO LIVE

Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness have a tremendous desire to live as God wants them to live. They want to live in conformity to God's will in their actions, their thoughts, their speech, and their worship. They want to live free of guilt. They want a right standing with God. They want to say with Jesus, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me" (John 4:34).

WE ARE NOT TO HUNGER FOR THE SATISFACTION, BUT RIGHTEOUSNESS

Let's be clear. Jesus is not urging us to hunger and thirst for a feeling or an experience. This might be why some hunger and thirst, but never have any satisfaction: they aren't hungering and thirsting for righteousness, but for satisfaction. Hungering and thirsting for righteousness is not the pursuit of an experience that makes you feel better about yourself. It's really the abandonment of trying to find satisfaction, which God promises, and instead pursuing righteousness which glorifies God.

THE WORLD DOESN'T GET IT

If nothing but God's righteousness will satisfy you, if it is your strong desire, if it is your greatest hope, then you stand apart from the world as a whole. The common ambitions of mankind have nothing to do with the righteousness of God. Those who share in this common ambitions will never understand you.

Paul wrote this to Titus and described the world very clearly:

Titus 3:3 (ESV) – 3 For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.

That's the world in action. That's all that you can expect from self-righteousness; just look at the Pharisees.

ONLY CHRISTIANS WILL HUNGER AND THIRST FOR TRUE RIGHTEOUSNESS

Only Christians truly hunger and thirst for righteousness supremely, constantly, and insatiably. Only Christians can hope for a righteousness that is genuine, growing, and perfect. Only Christians can turn away from the emptiness of worldly experiences and treasures for the sake of God's righteousness. Only Christians would prefer to wait for God's promise to be fulfilled, rather than try to satisfy themselves with emptiness and dust.

THE PURPOSE OF HUNGER AND THIRST

Hunger and thirst have a purpose. They focus our attention on what we really need. Do you remember your mom saying, "Don't eat, it's too close to dinner, you'll ruin your appetite"? If we nibbled on something every time we had a hunger pang, then when the meal came, we wouldn't want to eat. What she was saying, in essence, is that hunger and thirst won't kill you, and in fact they will make the meal all the more satisfying.

It's when we stop and let the hunger build and the thirst increase that we most value the satisfaction of those needs. Now, opinions vary, but in my opinion the best hamburger on the face of the earth is an In 'N Out Double-Double. You can't get them in Nebraska. I've only had a few in the last 19 years. But when I drive to Texas to pick up our daughter, Grace, to drive her to Maryland, I'm stopping at the first In 'N Out that I find.

Well, if you hunger and thirst for the righteousness of God, you won't be satisfied with anything less. If you are satisfied with lesser things, then it isn't the righteousness of God you long for, but the feeling of satisfaction, however it comes. That's a dangerous state of mind to have: "I don't care WHAT I am filled with, as long as I am filled!"

If you do care about the righteousness of God, then you will increasingly suffer from the lack of it, and that's a good thing. Let me tell you why.

THE VALUE OF ENDURING HUNGER AND THIRST

A person who so longs for the righteousness of God that nothing else will satisfy, and chooses to suffer spiritual hunger and thirst rather than trying to find momentary contentment elsewhere, is a person who pleases the Lord.

Paul wrote the Philippian church,

Philippians 3:7 (ESV) – 7 “But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.”

In other words, Paul stopped trying to find contentment outside of Christ. If that meant living with a deep, gnawing hunger in his soul, so be it. He trusted that in God's time, according to God's will, he would one day truly know Jesus. The value of knowing Jesus surpasses the value of everything else. He knew that one day he would gain Christ, that he would have the righteousness from God that depends on faith in Christ.

If you so long for the righteousness of God that you feel the lack of it deep within your soul, and you refuse to “nibble” on other things to try to quiet those hunger pangs, then you will one day – in God's time, not yours – be made exactly like Jesus Christ.

Think about Paul's words in First Corinthians 13:11-12,

1 Corinthians 13:11-12 (ESV) – 11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. **12** For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

Paul describes three points in time. He says, “In the past, I was a child, but I gave up childish ways. In the future I will see the Lord perfectly and know the Lord perfectly. For the present, I don't have the comfort of childishness, nor do I have the satisfaction of perfection. I am content to be in-between the two, and wait for the Lord to fulfill His promises, even though I long to be fully like Jesus Christ.”

TRANSITION: If we are in Christ, we can do what Paul did. We can give up childish satisfactions, and live with hunger for the fulfillment promised by the Lord.

THEY SHALL BE SATISFIED

Matthew 5:6 (ESV) – 6 “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, **for they shall be satisfied.**”

Those who accept the truth of Jesus’ words, and understand their hunger and thirst and emptiness and despair, will be satisfied. Satisfied is such a **big** word; it means that my heart, my soul, my mind, will be made content. Satisfied seems like a **risky** word; it means that I must give up my own attempts to please myself, and wait for the Lord’s time; do I trust Him? And yet satisfied is a hopeful word; God will fill me one day, according to His promise.

You see that it is those who helplessly hunger and thirst who are filled, and not those who find righteousness on their own. Those who are ultimately satisfied are those who patiently endure their hunger, and wait for the Lord to fill them. This is the truth: no one who longs for God’s righteousness will be disappointed. Ultimately, the righteousness of Christ is the only thing that will satisfy our longings. Nothing on earth can meet our deep need. God alone can give us the righteousness that will fill that hole in our hearts. Now, we do experience some partial righteousness now – it seems that the promises of God always have a down-payment or foretaste – but the fullness will happen in eternity.

We can’t be righteous on our own, and we can’t be satisfied on our own. Jesus did not say, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, and pursue it with all their being, and achieve it, and have the satisfaction of knowing that they did it themselves.” He said “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for the righteousness only God gives, for they will be filled as only God can fill them.”

God creates that hunger and thirst in our souls so that He may satisfy it. When He makes a sinner know his need for Christ, it is so that he may be drawn to Jesus for salvation. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness shall be satisfied.

- **They will be filled** with the peace of God that surpasses understanding (Philippians 4:7).
- They will be filled with the blessing of the Lord, and no sorrow will be added to it (Proverbs 10:22).

- They will be filled with praise and thanksgiving to God who works in us to will and to work for His good pleasure (Philippians 2:12-13).
- They will be filled with that which the world cannot give or take away (John 14:27).
- They will be filled to overflowing by the goodness and mercy of God (Psalm 23:5-6).
- They will be filled with glory, because they be exactly like Jesus in His glorified humanity (Second Corinthians 3:18).

BRINGING IT HOME

Let's bring this home.

Matthew 5:6 (ESV) – 6 “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”

It is good to recognize the limits on worldly things. Food feeds the body for a brief time. Water hydrates the body for a few hours. You work (and lose the time) in order to earn money (which you must spend) in order to buy a house (which is in need of constant attention) to live in (until your body dies). Nothing on earth is truly worthless, but nothing on earth lasts very long at all. Hungering and thirsting for righteousness comes as the Spirit of God causes us to understand that we were made to long for better things than this world can offer.

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS?

This is what Paul describes in Philippians 3:7-16.

You will abandon the things that do not satisfy that hunger. From the point of view of righteousness, everything that is not Christ is rubbish.

You will think about “gain” in a different way. You won't think about gaining possessions or fame or power or control, but of gaining Christ. Since Jesus can't be possessed or controlled, gaining Christ is really more a matter of Christ gaining you.

You will abandon any hope of self-righteousness, and instead pursue the righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, which is the only righteousness God grants, and which He only gives on the basis of faith.

You will long to know Jesus deeply in His life and resurrection and suffering.

You will be honest about yourself, and happily admit that you have not yet arrived, and nevertheless press on, surge forward, exert yourself, to make eternal life fully your own. Paul called himself a “wretched man” (Romans 7:24) and “the worst of sinners” (First Timothy 1:15).

You will leave behind everything worthless thing in terms of righteousness, and strain forward to what lies ahead of you: the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

AND, HOW DO WE KNOW THAT WE WILL BE SATISFIED?

Because God has promised that He will fill those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. We don't need to worry about whether He will keep His promises; He never fails. Our task isn't to satisfy ourselves, but to long for the fulfillment of His Word.

Some don't trust Him. Even some who call themselves Christians don't trust Him. They live like the man in the parable Jesus told in Luke 12, about the man who spends years building up his earthly fortunes. He finally achieved his goal, and said to himself, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.” But God said to him, “Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” How tragic to spend all of your time trying to build a big pile, only to die the very day you decided it was enough!

Do you trust Him? I'm not asking a theoretical question; I'm serious. Do you trust Him? Are you hungry and thirsty for what only the Father can give? Are you willing to wait for His promise to be fulfilled?

I pray that we would be hungry and thirsty for the righteousness of Christ to be fulfilled in us.