

Blessed Are the Hungry & Thirsty • Matthew 5:6

Probably all of us have said it at one time or another, “I’m hungry.” Maybe we’ve even said, “I’m starved.” The truth is that few of us have ever experienced genuine hunger much less starvation. Men have been known to kill in order to get food. There are records in history that women have murdered and eaten their own babies when faced with starvation. And thirst can be even worse. I’m told it is a terrible way to die. We have all experienced a dry mouth and parched throat at one time or another, but genuine thirst is something far more than the mouth and throat. It involves the whole body. Physiologists tell us that the internal environment (organs and tissues) senses the shortage of water when it starts to do damage and even destroy the cells of the body. Salt levels increase and the body fights to retain liquids, causing a person to stop perspiring or urinating in order to maintain liquid levels in the body. The tongue begins to swell and rapidly advancing dehydration can actually rack the entire human body with pain.

I’ve never experienced thirst to that degree, but there was a time some years ago when I feared that I might. Five of us were traveling across West Africa in the sub-Saharan where it was 130 degrees in the shade. We were careful to drink a liter of bottled water every couple of hours. We would buy it by the case and in some places we had to pay as much as five dollars per liter. We made sure we had a sufficient supply to get us to our destination. But then the Toyota Land Cruiser we were driving broke down in the 50 mile “no man’s land” between borders. In our group there was an Archaeologist familiar with desert survival. He quickly took charge and made it plain how we would store and ration the water that we had. It was

obvious that the protection and rationing of the water was a far greater priority than getting that vehicle running again.

When a person is hungry and thirsty enough, it becomes the driving force of life. You can take a hungry man somewhere and offer him the gift of a new Porsche and he’ll turn it down because he would rather have a loaf of bread. It is with this sense of the power of hunger and thirst in mind that Jesus described a Christian who is a citizen of Christ’s kingdom saying, “*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.*” And he said these words to an audience at a time and a place where hunger and thirst were much more common than any of us know.

Some say this may be the most important point that Jesus made in the Sermon on the Mount, considered by many to be the greatest sermon ever preached anywhere by anyone. Without a doubt, these fourteen words, if rightly heard and correctly understood, are powerful enough to change our lives.

This fourth beatitude contains four transforming truths. The first is that the way to happiness is via righteousness. The way I figure it, just about everyone anywhere wants to be happy. It’s the one item everyone can agree on. You can be rich or poor, young or old, male or female, president of the United States or of a Near Eastern country and happiness is what you’re after.

People look for happiness in money, sex, fame, power, jobs, titles, marriages, children, love, counseling and countless other things. And it is because we think those things lead to happiness that we value them in life. If we be-

If you are only going for happiness, you’ll miss it every time, but if you go for righteousness, you’ll get happiness on the side.

lieved money made us miserable, getting rich wouldn't be so popular. Love gets its own holiday, Valentine's Day, because love is considered to be a major contributor to our happiness. Everybody wants to be happy. Don't you?

Well, Jesus wants us to be happy. That is what "blessed" means. That is what the beatitudes are all about — happiness. But there is a non-secret here that most people don't know. In fact, even when most people hear it, they ignore it. It's that, "YOU'LL NEVER BECOME HAPPY BY GOING AFTER HAPPINESS."

People devote their lives to escaping pain and seeking happiness. We take drugs, lose ourselves in the pursuit of entertainment, move in and out of relationships, and yet never are really happy. Jesus knew that happiness is really a by-product. If you are only going for happiness, you'll miss it every time, but if you go for righteousness, you'll get happiness on the side.

Some time ago my wife and I went to visit a relative on her side of the family whom we hadn't seen for a year. The man was in his mid-eighties and when we got there we realized that he was still struggling with the same chronic cough that he had the last time we'd seen him. When we asked him about it he explained that he had tried various home remedies but nothing worked. We suggested maybe he should go to a doctor in case something was seriously wrong. He had some interesting reasons why he didn't want to go. He didn't have a doctor. In fact, he has rarely gone to a doctor in his life. As we explored this a little farther we got to the heart of the matter — he didn't want to have a shot because he had never had one.

Well, it took quite a bit of persuasion but we finally got him to go. The diagnosis was a chronic infection that was easily treated with an oral medication. The continuing cough was only a side effect of the real problem. Now he's okay and he didn't even have to have a shot!

I think that old man is a lot like people who

are looking for happiness. We think that we can find it for ourselves. We open the medicine cabinets of our lives and we take all of the home remedies we can find to make ourselves happy. Yet we are reluctant to go to the divine physician to get the real problem diagnosed. He has a prescription for us that is not painful at all. When we finally go to see him, we discover that the real issue of life is righteousness and happiness is a side effect. When you are righteous, then you get the happiness that everyone is looking for. Or to put it more directly, the only way that anyone will ever get real happiness is by way of righteousness. As Jesus said, "*Blessed (happy) are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.*"

In spite of its importance, "righteousness" as a word is not a part of very many people's vocabularies so we need to be sure that we understand what it means. I suppose in simplest definition, to be righteous is to be "right with God." It means both being right and doing right.

I think we know what it means to be right. I know when I have a right relationship with someone else and I know when I don't. I know if I have offended someone, I can sense that there is something between us. And so we often say in our relationships with one another, "We need to make things right." Sometimes that means an apology, sometimes spending time together, sometimes paying a bill that is long overdue — whatever it takes to make the relationship right again.

The same thing is true with God. We need to do whatever needs to be done to remove the barriers and to have a right and proper relationship with him or we will never be blessed or happy.

But righteousness is more than being right, it also means doing right. We often talk about "doing the right thing." For example, in business we say, "All you need to do is to treat people right." Doing right is also telling the truth when you could easily tell a lie. Or it's keeping our word, not stealing something that could be

stolen, or keeping marriage vows even when it is hard to do. It's being generous, not greedy.

But most of all righteousness is doing right by God. It's keeping God's rules. It's doing things God's way. It's being like Jesus. And Jesus is teaching us in the Beatitudes that the only way we can be happy and blessed is by being right and by doing right. Now, we can either take Jesus' wise word on this and very quickly get to happiness, or we can do what millions of people have done and continue to do, and that is to spend a lifetime trying all the other ways that won't work. Jesus says, "*Happy are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.*"

There are very few things that drive a man or a woman more than really being hungry or thirsty. In fact those who are really hungry or thirsty will do just about anything. A man will walk 100 miles in order to get water. A woman will sell her most precious possessions in order to get food if she is starving. History is full of records of countries that have gone to war for water or cities that have surrendered to ruthless enemies in order to get food.

Jesus says that God especially loves and blesses Christians who are that hungry, who are that thirsty for righteousness. We live in a chapter of history in which people have very strong individual opinions about a wide variety of causes. In fact I think that is one of the reasons that we become so polarized in congress or in business or in communities or in families. Everyday on television we see or hear about people who will do just about anything for money, for drugs, for sex or for politics. Some people will do just about anything for war, for peace, for abortion or to stop abortion or for more taxes or less taxes.

The question is, who is that driven for righteousness? Who would do anything to be right-

eous? Who wakes up in the morning thirsting for God? Who has the rumble not of the stomach, but the rumble of the soul throughout the day and the hunger and the thirst for the righteousness of God? Who is willing to pay any price in order to get this extraordinarily eternally precious commodity of being right and doing right in relation to God? Who? The Christian. The disciple of Jesus Christ. The blessed and happy person.

Righteousness, God's kingdom and Jesus Christ are the driving motivations of the Christian. We believe the words of Jesus in Matthew

6:33 when he tells us to "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

There are ten thousand distractions

in our lives to turn our attention away from righteousness. Satan will tell us that there are more important matters than righteousness or that righteousness can wait until later, but don't believe him. Like the thirsty man running for water or the hungry woman begging for food, the Christian lives for righteousness.

The opportunities for righteousness abound. In school, at work, when you are with your family, when you are with your spouse, during the tough times or in the easy times, every single day you choose between righteousness or unrighteousness. The Christian is to seek righteousness in them all! Jesus said, "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.*"

Jesus' point ends with wonderful words, "*they will be filled.*" The most powerful truth in this fourth Beatitude is that only Jesus satisfies.

In Minnesota we are very familiar with self-service gas stations. Most gas stations wouldn't fill your tank if you wanted them to do it. But

Jesus says that God especially loves and blesses Christians who are that hungry, who are that thirsty for righteousness.

did you know that there are two states in this country where self-service gas stations are illegal? One on the west coast and one on the east coast, Oregon and New Jersey. One time when we were on a trip in Oregon I watched as people with out of state plates pulled into the gas station and many of them, out of habit, would get out of the car, pick up the gas pump handle, turn on the switch and start to fill their tank. About that time the service station attendant would come out and tell the driver to get back into the car while the attendant fills the tank. Some of the drivers are stunned. They've never seen such a thing and they don't really know how it works because they have always pumped their own gas.

Well let me tell you, God doesn't have self-service righteousness stations. We cannot pump our own. It's absolutely against the rules. The only righteousness we can have is that which God pumps into us. It is his righteousness and he does the filling. To quote Jesus again, this time from John 6:35, he said, "*I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.*"

It's not our responsibility to get our own self-righteousness. Our responsibility as Christians is to be hungry and thirsty for that righteousness. So I ask you, even though I know it's kind of a personal question, are you? Are you thirsty, hungry for righteousness? More than anything else in life do you want to be right? Are you starved to be like God? Are you thirsty for Jesus Christ? Is righteousness more important to you than anything else? Is it the driving obsession of your life? If yes, then come to God and he will fill you to the brim with Jesus. You will be as right as Jesus is right and you will be fueled to do right as Jesus did right. You will be full and you will be happy.

The other night our family went to dinner at one of those all-you-can-eat pizza places. I was hungry all afternoon just thinking about it. My appointments went late so I called home

and everyone was waiting when I pulled into the driveway. We hurried to the restaurant and went inside to the counter. The guy was busy in the back and kept us waiting for what seemed like a very long time. When he finally came out I shoved the money at him, grabbed my plate and glass and went right over to the pizza buffet. I took a slice from the first pizza that was there and I just stood there and ate it. And then I filled the plate up and went over to the pop machine and filled the glass up and drank it. I just stood there and drank it and then filled up the glass again. Then I went to our table and polished off all the pizza that I had piled on my plate – and then went back for more! I'm not going to tell you how much I ate, but I was full! They had to roll me out of there in order to get back to the car. I was full and satisfied, but, you know, just thinking about it makes me want to go back and start all over again!

But let me tell you about a far, far better deal. You can go to God the Father, hungry and thirsty for righteousness and he will fill you full with Jesus Christ. You will be satisfied and you will be happy and you will want to go back again and again to be full to the brim.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."

Faith Matters is the Broadcast Ministry of
Leith Anderson and Wooddale Church
6630 Shady Oak Road
Eden Prairie MN 55344
952-944-6300
www.wooddale.org
©Leith Anderson