

Hungry for Holiness

Matthew 5:6

Are you hungry this evening? I'm certain you, are for to be human is to hunger. Maybe you aren't hungry for physical food right at the moment. But if you would stop and consider your heart, you would find a number of different hungers there: the hunger for security, the hunger for deep companionship, the hunger for relief from sickness or grief. We are awash with longings. We want to be loved, we want to live meaningful lives, we want to be forgiven, we want to be happy. And these are not bad things. We were created to hunger. We were made with desires which cry out to be satisfied.

"Because no one but God is self-sufficient, everyone else in creation has hunger – whether for food, for meaning, for love."

Hunger is a blessing if you think of it. Like a nerve awakens us to injury, hunger awakens us to our need for nourishment and drives us to seek out God-intended satisfaction. Think of the delight you would miss in life if you were never hungry for food, or never desired deep companionship, or never yearned to use your gifts in a meaningful way in the world.

This evening, Jesus wishes to wake in us a hunger for life!

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

I. A Fierce Hunger

Why does Jesus use this particular metaphor? Why not "Blessed are those who try to live good lives"? The answer is that Jesus is speaking of something much more than moral effort.

The Greek word Jesus uses for *hunger* refers to the effects of famine, an extended under-nourishment. In other words, this is not the hunger you feel at 11:00 in the morning after having skipped breakfast. It is the deep, all-consuming hungering and thirst you feel after 10 days in the desert. It is a hunger and thirst that has consumed you; you can think of nothing else. It is as elemental as the desire to live because you realize that, in fact, your very life hinges on having this need fulfilled. Blessed are those who ache for righteousness, who crave it with an unceasing passion. Blessed are those who stumble after God desperate for this one thing, who realize that nothing else matters beside this.

One of the deadly diseases in the church is we have a poor spiritual appetite. Sin has made us lose our taste-buds for the things of God. Aren't there times when you simply lack a hunger for God?? We pray and do Bible studies as though they were vitamins – you do it

because you know it is good for you, but you don't savor the taste. You don't relish the food of grace with a sweet, holy satisfaction.

A person who experiences only a little physical hunger will probably only eat a little food. And even the food eaten will be done out of duty or sense of ought. How many people worship the same way? They have little hunger for the things of God. Jesus call us to hunger with a true spiritual desire and longing.

II. A Specific Hunger

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

What exactly are we craving when we hunger for righteousness?

A. A Hunger for God

It is not a desire to be good, to be a moral person. Ghandi wanted to be good. But he didn't want righteousness. Anyone can experience a desire to be a better person or even a religious person. But that isn't what Jesus has in mind. At its core, to crave and ache for righteousness is to long for God. That's because "righteousness" is a term that only has meaning in relation to God. Geerhardus Vos, a great theologian of the past, wrote this:

"Righteousness in Scripture is an idea saturated with the thought of God.

Righteousness is the opposite of sin, and as the conception of sin is inseparable from the reference to God, so in precisely the same manner, the reference to God is inherent in the idea of righteousness." (sermon on Matthew 5:6)

As Jesus speaks these words, he is denying the idea of righteousness held by those listening to him. When they thought of righteousness they thought of law-keeping. They thought the Pharisees were righteous because the Pharisees kept the law better than anyone. Their conception of righteousness lacked this vivid sense of God's presence and inestimable value. In Matthew 15:8 we see Jesus rebuking the "righteousness" of his day with words of the Prophet Isaiah,

"This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me."

Their righteousness had very little to do with God at all.

To hunger and thirst for righteousness, then, is, in the first place, to ache for God! And that's what we find repeatedly in the psalms!

Psalm 27:4 *One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek, that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple.*

Psalm 42:1-2 *As the deer pants for streams of water so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?*

Psalm 63:1 *O God, you are my God. Earnestly I seek you, my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you in a dry and weary land where there is no water.*

Psalm 73:25 *Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.*

Psalm 84:1-2 *How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.*

There is a passion and hunger and longing here for God. Do you know what this feels like? Think about the things you long for, the things you hunger for in life. Is God on that list? Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness!

B. A Deep Desire to Do His Will

Those who hunger for God hunger for his word! If you are in love, you not only long to be in the presence of your beloved – you delight in his or her words.

Psalm 119:97 *Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.*

Psalm 119:70, 72 *I delight in your law...The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold.*

Why was God's law so precious to him? Because God was precious to him.

Psalm 119:57 *You are my portion, O LORD; I have promised to obey your words.*

This is the hungering to which Jesus calls us.

Now, what's wrong with us, that we don't feel that way all the time?

III. What's Wrong with Us?

1. *Sin has deadened us to spiritual food.* Sin has robbed us of our taste for God and consequently we don't sense our hunger for him. In the perfection of paradise, Adam and Eve were keenly aware of their deep hungering for God and they satiated that holy hunger

daily in God's presence. But when the Eve tasted the physical fruit her spiritual tongue went dead. And every natural born man is born that way. We simply don't have a taste for the things of God. People have a taste for religion, for spirituality. But unless God regenerates our heart, we simply have no longing or desire for God. We have no sense of the all-surpassing pleasures of God. What a tragedy sin has caused: a whole world filled with people made in the image of God's glory, surrounded by a creation effervescent with God's beauty, everyone with an inconsolable longing which only God can satisfy – and yet eternally, entirely dead to God.

The glory of God's great work of regeneration is that he awakens in our soul a longing for God – often by making us sick on the junk food of this world.

The prodigal son is a great example. The world offered him the food of freedom, sexual indulgence, parties, and friends. It looked so good, and so he ate. What finally brought him to his senses? He realized he was starving.

J. N. Darby, quoted by M. Lloyd Jones: "When the prodigal son was hungry he went to feed upon husks, but when he was starving he turned to his father."

God will often bring us to the point of spiritual starvation and death – so that we can finally realize our desperate need for the food only he can give.

I think the Samaritan woman at the well would be another example. She was thirsty, wasn't she? Thirsty for security, for comfort, for freedom. But Jesus awakened in her a thirst for something more when he offered her living water.

John 4:13-14 *Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.*

"Sir, give me this water!"

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness!

III. A Blessed Hunger

A. Because it Corresponds to Our Greatest Need

Our greatest need is this one thing – to be with God. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for God. Their starving souls will drive them to ask and to seek and to knock, and the door will be opened to them.

Blessed are those who realize they are starving and dying apart from true fellowship with God in Christ. Blessed are those who have realized that the dry husks of this world will never be able to give life to their souls. They have finally awakened to their deepest and greatest need.

B. Because it Corresponds to Our Greatest Joy

A hunger for food is a good thing because it leads you to food and drink, which is essential for your physical health. Every other hunger, for love, for meaningful work, for deep friendship, for adventure – they all correspond to related joys. We are led to pleasures we couldn't have imagined and joys we never would have sought were it not for the hunger. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for God. That hunger corresponds to the greatest imaginable joy. It will lead them to pleasures unimaginable, to a peace that passes understanding, to joy inexpressible and full of glory. Oh, blessed are you if you are hungry for God.

C. Because it Will Infallibly Be Filled

Isaiah 55:1-2 Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters;

and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.

2 Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?

Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.

John 6:35 Then Jesus declared, "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."

IV. Application

Where is your heart this evening? Are you hungering and thirsting for God? For Christ? For righteousness? It is the mark of those who belong to the kingdom.

1. What in your life do you need to set aside so that you can regain a taste for God and begin to hunger and thirst for righteousness? What bitterness and anger do you need to part with? You can't feed on it and God at the same time. What lusts need to be surrendered? What pride has to be acknowledged? What covetousness has to be relinquished?
2. Run to Christ – he alone can satisfy your hunger for God and for holiness. He can make you righteous, as a legal fact before God and as a reality in person.

3. Feed your thirst. Attend God's holy feasts – his worship, his word, and sacraments, where you feed on Christ Jesus. Feed on God's presence in his people, Christian fellowship.

Rev. 19:9 *Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!*

An eternal feast with Christ is coming. Are you hungry? Amen.