

Text: Matthew 5:6 (Pew Bible pg.958)

Title: “Happy are the Hungry!”

INTRODUCTION

Let's open our Bibles once again to Matthew 5. During these summer months we're focusing on what are called the Beatitudes, the eight statements that Jesus strings together in the opening of the Sermon on the Mount. They describe the radical qualities of people who follow Jesus in the Kingdom of God. Please stand as I read vv.1-12. Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.” It's my prayer that a hunger and thirst for righteousness has driven you to church today ... to pray and worship and encourage and minister and to feed on the Word of God. If so, the promise of God's word is that you will be filled. Thanks; you can be seated.

ILLUSTRATION – One of the hottest novels and movies in the last few years is Hunger Games. The story takes place in a futuristic, fabulously wealthy city known as The Capitol which is surrounded by twelve districts which have been kept in hunger and poverty because of they tried to rebel against the Capitol many years before. Each year they observe something called the Hunger Games. One boy and one girl from each district are selected by an annual lottery to participate in the Hunger Games, an event in which the participants (or "tributes") must fight to the death in an outdoor arena controlled by the Capitol, until only one individual remains. On one hand you see the “hunger” of the affluent citizens of The Capitol for the entertainment of watching these young people fight it out to death. Their frivolous greeting to the young people on this holiday is “Happy Hunger Games, and may the odds be ever in your favor.” On the other hand in the citizens of the poverty-stricken districts you see the hunger to survive. And these 24 young people are caught in the middle.

The books and movies are full of violence, pride, greed, and tyranny. But many have observed that “Hunger Games” is a perfect picture of our world. It shows the power of hunger ... whether it is the hunger for pleasure and entertainment, or the hunger for food or the hunger for meaning in life. It shows what happens when people have no hope ... what happens when the hunger and thirst for personal success, safety, and survival can cause people to do despicable things. “Hunger Games” is a picture of a world without the hope and meaning in life that we know is found only in Jesus Christ.

The Bible states in Ecclesiastes that God has set eternity in our hearts. That means that deep inside of us we all know that we were created for more than this world will ever supply us. We all live with this longing ... this hunger. We are homesick for heaven and homesick for God. So we have this longing, and we try to satisfy it with vacations or entertainment or hobbies. And while there's nothing inherently wrong with those things, they were never meant to satisfy the longing for God inside of each of us. Sometimes this longing drives us to things that *are* wrong. Things like drugs or alcohol or sexual immorality or greedy materialism might distract us from the homesickness. But ultimately the buzz of those things goes away, mostly leaving us even emptier than we were before, and now loaded with guilt. And the Spirit of God calls us to Himself, but we turn away again and again to things that will never satisfy us. And it has always been that way with humans.

So it was good news to the disciples of Jesus 2000 years ago, and it's good news to us today to hear Jesus say...

Matthew 5:6 - Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

My desire is for the Holy Spirit to convince us this morning that whether we know or not, our deepest longing is really not for more stuff, more pleasures, more intoxication or ecstasy. The deepest longing in our soul is for God ... to be right with God. He has set eternity in our hearts. We are made for more than just this life.

QUOTE: C.S. Lewis: "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world."

In this simple, yet radical, statement of Jesus He talks about...

1. AN ALL-CONSUMING PASSION

Matthew 5:6 - Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...

Jesus congratulates people who have this all-consuming passion ... this hunger and thirst ... for righteousness.

Remember that Jesus wisely strings these statements together in a logical sequence. When I understand my poverty of spirit (I am spiritually broke), it causes me to mourn and to be broken over my separation from God. Then I come to the point where I am willing to be meek ... to release control of my life to God. So the first three beatitudes leave us utterly empty, to where all that is left is a hunger and thirst for something we can't do or gain for ourselves.

Now the word "righteousness" is one of the most important words in the Bible. It is found in hundreds of places in the OT and the NT. It means to be right with God (positively) and to get free of the grip of sin that separates us from God (negatively). So to hunger and thirst for righteousness means I long to be like the One who is my righteousness ... Jesus Christ.

THE GIFT – This is a position of righteousness in which I stand before God completely forgiven and totally right with God. This is not something we earn, but something that is given to us a free gift of His grace. Even the great Apostle Paul had to say, "My righteousness is as filthy rags." And so when we put our trust in Christ we are given righteousness ... right-standing before God.

2 Corinthians 5:21 - God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

And then Paul talks about his own personal passion for this righteousness:

Philippians 3:9 – (I want to) be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

Philippians 3:10 - I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,

So to hunger and thirst for this kind of righteousness is what drives us to be saved. If you die before first being clothed in this righteousness, you will stand before God in the filthy rags of your own righteousness which will not get you into heaven.

THE ACTS – These are the practices of righteousness. When we are truly right with God through the gift of righteousness, what should flow out of our lives are acts of righteousness.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is concerned about righteousness. Look on a little further down in Matthew 5:

Matthew 5:20 - For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

The righteousness that Jesus is looking for in His followers is more than just being overly religious.

Then a little deeper into the Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 6:1 - “Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

We don’t do acts of righteousness to impress God or others. They are to flow naturally from our lives because we are right with God.

So righteousness is the very life of God in us. So when we hunger and thirst for righteousness we, in essence, hunger and thirst for God.

Matthew 5:6 - Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...

Now let’s talk a little about what it means to hunger and thirst for righteousness.

ILLUSTRATION – I was thinking about this not long ago. I took my car in to have the oil changed. But you know that it’s never that easy. Because the guy wants to sell you more than just an oil change. He wants to sell you some transmission fluid, and some power steering fluid and some window washing fluid and some radiator fluid. So there are all these reservoirs ... tanks ... in your car. And the challenge is to keep them all full, including your gas tank. But there’s only one thing that ultimately keeps your car running ... gasoline. And you can’t put oil or water or power steering fluid in your gas tank and expect your car to run. The same thing is true in life.

All of us, whether we know it or not, have this hunger and thirst for God. Most of us just don’t know what do to with it. And many times we just look for pleasures and experiences that mask the deeper hunger and thirst. So Jesus isn’t congratulating people who are just hungry and thirsty. He

congratulates the ones who are so hungry and thirsty that it drives them with an all-consuming passion to God.

The word for “hunger” means to strongly desire something, not just a mild appetite. This is an insatiable hunger. And the word for “thirst” is not just to be a little dry in your mouth; it means a strong desire for something to drink. In fact, the way the sentence is constructed here points to not just hunger for some food or thirst for a drink of water. It’s much more intense than that. It means to be hungry for all the food there is and to be thirsty for all the water there is. It’s something that keeps on until it is satisfied.

A person dying of starvation and thirst has a single, all-consuming passion for something to eat or drink. Nothing else really matters. And when we understand that we desperately need God for our very life, our all-consuming passion is for Him.

Psalm 42:1 - As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God.

So God has placed eternity in our hearts so that we might hunger and thirst after Him with an all-consuming passion. And the good news is that at the other end of that all-consuming passion is...

2. AN ALL-SATISFYING PROVISION

Matthew 5:6 - Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Literally Jesus means, “They, and they alone, will be filled.” “Filled” means “satisfied” or “saturated.”

The real hunger in every human being is the hunger for God. There is a God-shaped hole in us that can only be filled by God. To hunger and thirst for righteousness is to hunger and thirst for the life of God in us. If we misunderstand this hunger we will try to fill it ourselves with the pleasures of this world. Notice that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will not fill themselves; they will *be filled* ... by God. We can’t do it for ourselves.

Charles Spurgeon said: “He that gave you a thirst for His grace intends to satisfy that thirst.”

ILLUSTRATION – Some of you know that one of my tremendous accomplishments in life is that I ate the 72-ounce steak at the Big Texan Steakhouse in Amarillo. You may have driven by there. You see, the deal is that if you eat the steak in an hour you get it free. Well I was a college student, and Nan and I were returning from Glorieta with some of our BSU group. We stopped there to eat and a couple of us guys decided to try it. The deal is that you had to pay for the steak up front so that you couldn’t walk out without paying. So I put up the last \$16 I had to my name. I had to eat it, or I would have been broke for the rest of the month. Well I did it. (You get dessert free ... as if anyone had room for dessert!) As I walked out of the restaurant I thought, “I’m so full, I’ll never be hungry again.” And the next morning when I got up I was still full. But along about lunch time I started to get hungry again. That’s the way it is with the things of this world.

And here is the wonder of the Gospel. What we cannot do for ourselves (satisfy that hungering and thirsting to be right with God), God does for us by grace through Christ.

Here's what happens: We are *immediately* "filled" when we are saved. And we are *progressively* filled throughout every day of this life. And we will be *completely* filled when we get to heaven.

When I say we are *immediately* filled I'm describing what the Bible calls JUSTIFICATION. We are justified by Christ and His righteousness and the barrier of sin and guilt between us and God is taken away. And the righteousness of Christ is immediately imputed to you. God looks at you and sees, not your sin and unrighteousness, but the righteousness of His Son, Jesus Christ. He no longer sees our sin. What an amazing thing!

And when I say that we are *progressively* filled I'm describing what the Bible calls SANCTIFICATION. Now there's a paradox with righteousness. You are filled, but you still long for more. The good news is that there's an inexhaustible supply of righteousness in Christ. The more we crave the more we can have. We are progressively filled as we experience the progressive freedom from the power and the pollution of sin in our lives. When we are saved we are delivered from the penalty of sin. Through sanctification we are delivered from the power and the pollution of sin in our lives.

And when I say that we will be *completely* filled I'm describing what the Bible calls GLORIFICATION. You see there is a day coming when we will be completely and eternally filled. In our mortal bodies we are leaking buckets. With our new glorious bodies there we shall stand in His presence absolutely perfect in body, soul and spirit with the complete, entire righteousness which we have received in the Lord Jesus Christ. Every hunger and thirst of our soul will be completely satisfied.

QUOTE: C.S. Lewis: "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world."

QUESTIONS:

- Are you dissatisfied with where you are spiritually?

Philippians 3:13-14 - Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

- Do you desire things that are eternal?

A starving woman will not be satisfied with a lovely arrangement of flowers. She must have food. A dehydrated man will not be satisfied with the latest electronic gadget. He must have water.

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.

Does this desire drive you to the Word of God and to communion with God in prayer? Does it drive you to seek God in worship?

- Are you **disgusted** with unrighteous living?

EXAMPLE: When the prodigal son was a little hungry he got by on the pig's food. When he was starving he ran home to his father.

- Do you **delight** in doing what is right?

1 John 3:7 - Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.

If you put happiness before righteousness, you will never be happy. But if you put righteousness first, you will experience God's satisfying provision of all things. In fact, Jesus talked to His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount about worry ... worrying about this and that. He comes to say this:

Matthew 6:33 - But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

So we need to hear the invitation of God this morning:

Isaiah 55:2 - 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.