

May 10, 2020
The Sermon on the Mount (5)
The Happiness of a Hungry Heart
Matthew 5:6
Rev. Dr. Charles Yoon

This morning we are going to focus on Matthew 5:6 in which Jesus said, *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”* Hunger is an intense desire and the strongest of motives. It produces energy and drives decisive action. There are three observations about hunger. First, hunger is a sign of need. Hunger indicates the absence of food in the body. Second, hunger is a sign of life. Nobody teaches how to be hungry. Where there’s life, there’s hunger. Third, hunger is a sign of health. A healthy appetite is a good sign that a person is well. But if a person loses his appetite, it is usually a sign that something is wrong. If we have a deep longing to grow in Christ, that’s a good sign about our spiritual health. True Christians never feel they have arrived at a righteous life. They hunger and thirst for righteousness. This passion to pursue righteousness is a hallmark of a true believer.

But in verse 5, Jesus speaks of an inner yearning that all people experience. We yearn and long for a peace and fulfillment that we can always have no matter how hard life gets. This yearning for lasting joy is part of the way we are made. But even though we know that the things of this earth don’t satisfy, we still foolishly keep going back to the things of this earth. Sometimes we seek to satisfy our inner hunger and thirst with possessions. Commercials promise that if we buy their products, satisfaction is guaranteed. We still keep returning to “earthly wells” to find fulfillment. We drink from wells that do not satisfy our longing for more in life. No matter how much we have, our possessions and pleasures always leave us feeling empty and yearning for more. Has any “thing” ever made you feel satisfied? Has any possession ever brought you lasting fulfillment? Ecclesiastes 5:10 says, *“He who loves things, will never have enough. It is foolish to think that wealth brings happiness!”* Our possessions and pleasures make us happy, but not for long.

In today text Jesus says, *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”* There are two things that will help us truly understand the kind of hunger for righteousness. First, Jesus talks about a desire for complete righteousness. People who experience a *‘makarios’* yearn to give God all of their lives. They see the need to be righteous in everything they do. Usually we content ourselves with a partial righteousness. For example, we may say, “I’m not perfect, but I’ve never robbed a bank.” “I may not be the best husband or wife, but I’ve never committed adultery or killed anyone.” Some people are confident of their own righteousness. Other people are content in their sins. However, Jesus says if we want to be completely satisfied, we must yearn for complete righteousness. We must strive to be holy and pure in thought, word, and deed. We must give God control of every aspect of our lives. The blessing belongs to those who have a strong desire to grow in righteousness.

Second, Jesus speaks of an intense desire for a right relationship with God. In fact, most of us don’t know what it means to be really hungry or really thirsty. Even though we are limited to visit grocery stores because of caution of COVID 19, we must thank God for the bountiful country He has blessed us with, because hunger and thirst is never an intense thing for us. In our culture we think of hunger as a “Big Mac Attack” or “Chipotle Attack.” For many, being thirsty is time to hit the fridge for a cold soft drink or a glass of water. But that’s not what it was like for the people who heard this sermon. Back then, the typical working man in Palestine almost never had a full belly. As hard as they labored, they still barely made enough to survive. They would have eaten meat only once a week or once a month. Thirst for them was even more of an issue. There was no such thing as a drinking fountain. There were no bottled beverages available in the fridge. They were thirsty all the time. Food and water were necessities and used carefully and never wasted.

In this beatitude the question is “How much do you want goodness? “How much do you want to be right with God?” “Do you want it as much as a starving man wants food, as much as a man who stumbles out of the desert with a sunburned face, cracked lips, and a parched throat wants water?” “How intense, how strong, is your desire to be completely right with God?” The Psalmist said, “*As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for You, Oh God! My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.*” (Psalm 42:1-2) What we really need in life is to be completely right with God, to be in the center of His will and to be pure in His eyes. The only way to be right with God, the only way to have the kind of intimate day-to-day relationship with God is through faith in Jesus Christ.

In today’s text Jesus talks about hungering and being satisfied at the same time. How are we to understand this? When we feel hungry, we eat a meal, and when we have eaten, we are satisfied. The food takes the hunger away, at least for a time. When we are satisfied, we are no longer hungry. But Jesus speaks of hunger and a satisfaction that exist together at the same time. This is the dynamic of the Christian life. Godly men and women have found joy in this mystery of hunger and satisfaction through the ages.

Paul says that he wants 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 on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death*” (Philippians 3:9-10). The holiness has begun in us in this life and will be complete in us in the presence of Jesus. When we see Christ, we will be like Him (1 John 3). Sin will no longer be in us, or in the people around us.

What will it be like when the people of God are before the throne of God? There will be a new heaven and a new earth. It will be the home of righteousness. All who hungered and thirsted for righteousness will be there. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore, for the lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and He will guide them to springs of living water (Revelation 7:16-17). God’s people will be satisfied, because Christ will give them the righteousness that they seek. This is the great promise of the Gospel. If we don’t have any hunger for righteousness at all, Christ is provoking this and awakening this in us. He does this so that we will receive. He creates a hunger and a thirst for righteousness in us, so that we may be satisfied for all eternity.

This morning we need to realize that what we really need in life is to change our diet, to stop feeding on pleasure or performance or possessions. We need to accept Jesus’ invitation to quench our thirst and satisfy our hunger by claiming the forgiveness for sin that He offers freely through His death on the cross. We need to make the commitment to give Him complete control of our life. We need to re-affirm our commitment to be in the center of God’s will every day.

I want to end today with a prayer from Aiden Wilson Tozer who was an author and pastor of C&MA. It is a heart-cry for holiness, the response of a heart with a deep longing for God. I hope you and I will make this prayer our own today.

“O God, I have tasted Your goodness, and it has both satisfied me and made me thirsty for more. I am painfully conscious of my need of further grace. I am ashamed of my lack of desire. O God, the Triune God, I want to want You. I long to be filled with longing; I thirst to be made more thirsty still. Show me Your glory, I pray that I may know You indeed. Begin in mercy a new work of love within me. Say to my soul ‘Rise up my love and come away.’ Then give me the grace to rise and follow You, up from this misty lowland where I have wandered so long. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.” (A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*)