

Happy Are the Hungry and Thirsty

Matthew 5:6

It is a fact that no two people are exactly alike. We are different from one another in so many ways. We have different fingerprints; eye, hair, and skin colors; heritage; intelligence levels; and personalities, not to mention height and weight. **But we are all alike in that we hunger and thirst.** Jesus, in his usual manner of simplifying that which is complicated, used this common demonstration to express the truth concerning the way to happiness.

In our studies of Jesus' teachings in what we call the Beatitudes, we have seen that happiness is inward. Happiness is living life "from the inside out." Happiness begins by allowing the architect of the ages to place your life on His potter's wheel to mold and make us according to His design.

The Word of God tell us that in the beginning, the hand of God scooped up a handful of clay, molded it, breathed life into it, and man became a living soul. Psalm 139:14 says, "I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works." Today, when we come to Him battered, blemished and broken, He places our clay frame upon His wheel of love and remakes us and releases us as a vessel of perfection, beauty and honor. **The next time you look in the mirror, tell yourself confidently,** "God doesn't manufacture junk, and He doesn't sponsor flops. I'm an original expression of God's creative genius."

We have already seen that happiness requires that we be broken in spirit, which leads to mourning for wrongdoing and then to the quality of meekness. Today we are ready for the final inward condition for happiness: what Jesus calls "hunger and thirst for righteousness."

Hungering and thirsting is a powerful metaphor that touches every life. It expresses the inward cry of every soul for its very life. **Therefore, Jesus uses the painful experience of hungering and thirsting, and uses it as a light to shine on the spiritual needs of His listeners.** And in so doing, He says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."

In the sixteenth century, when the majestic King James version of the Bible was being put together, "righteousness" meant "right wise," or "as it ought to be." We can think of it simply as "right living."

"Righteousness" is "right living" according to God's standard of holiness. The Lord says in 1 Peter 1:16, "Be holy, because I am holy." Our standards of right living are not to be chosen by the herd instinct of our humanistic society. **Humanism has deified man and demoted God to a cosmic bellhop responding to our patronizing tips.** Humanistic society states "I am the captain of my soul and the master of my fate." But God has published His standard of righteousness in the Word of God, the Bible.

The United States government has a National Bureau of Standards in Washington, D.C. It sets the standards for weights and measures all over the country. It guarantees that a pound of steak weighs sixteen ounces whether you order it in North Carolina or in Florida. Distance, time and public opinion do not affect the National Bureau of Standards.

The Bible is the ultimate standard of righteousness for all people all over the world. What is sin in North Carolina is sin in Europe, in Africa, in Asia and everywhere else on the face of the earth. Distance, time and public opinion do not affect God's standard of righteousness according to Psalm 119:89, "Forever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven." It was Jesus Himself that said in Mark 13:31, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."

Paul gave this warning to young Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:1-4, "I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables." **What attitude should the church take toward a sin-saturated world that protests against God's standard of righteousness as being "out of step with the times"?** Shall we lower the standard of righteousness so that our modern-day Pharisees and immoral and godless rogues can sit with comfort in the house of God?

The truth is, it is not in our power to lower the standard of righteousness. God has forever established that standard on earth through the life of Jesus Christ. Those who profess to lower the standard to appease

complacent congregations are hirelings, not shepherds. They are preaching a false gospel.

Righteousness is not living "just a cut above" the pagan next door. Righteousness is "right living" according to the Word of God. The garments of righteousness never go out of style. **God never alters the robe of righteousness to fit the man.** Rather He alters the man to fit the robe. God doesn't have "different strokes for different folks." Time, distance or changes in public attitudes do not alter God's standard of righteousness one iota.

The Japanese have a saying that a snake lies straight as long as it's kept inside a bamboo stick. When released, it starts wiggling and acting "snaky" again.

Many people have what I call restrained righteousness. As long as they are forced by external restraints (in the presence of the preacher, their boss, their mate, their children, or someone they are trying to impress) to be as they ought to be, they appear to be righteous. But when the exterior restraints are removed, their genuine character is revealed. They start acting "snaky."

Physical force is an obvious form of external restraint. When I was a child, my conduct was kept "as it ought to be" by my father's leather strap. It didn't make me "hunger and thirst after righteousness," but it sure made me desire not to get caught. **When I was away from the house, I started acting "snaky" again.** Some people are like that today – when they are at church they act righteous, but during the week they start acting "snaky" again.

Legalism, for example, is an external restraint. Legalism is a man-made religious system structured around certain rules and regulations and enforced by peer pressure. But following man-made rules and regulations doesn't constitute the righteousness of God. In fact, Isaiah 64: 6 reminds us that "All our righteousness is as filthy rags." Paul expressed his concern on the subject of legalism this way in Galatians 3:2, "This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?" **Ladies and gentlemen, the Spirit of God does not respond to methods, programs and man's gimmicks.** And the truth of the matter is this - you can't *DO* enough *GOOD* things to be saintly!

The Greek verbs that Jesus uses here in Matthew 5:6 are very powerful. The Greek word translated "hunger" means "to suffer deep hunger." The Greek

word translated "thirst" means "to be consumed with thirst." **It is the idea of a baby being born with an innate hunger and thirst.** 1 Peter 2:2 says, "As newborn babies, desire the sincere milk of the word, that you may grow thereby." In the mind of Jesus, it is only natural for a person to be born into God's kingdom to hunger and thirst after righteousness.

But in Matthew 5:6 Jesus carries it a step further. Jesus speaks of a "hunger" of a man who is starving for food, and of the man who will die unless he has some water to drink.

The question today is this - How much do you want to be righteous? Or to put it another way – How much do you want to be conformed to the image of Jesus in your living? Do you want it as much as a starving man wants food, or as much as a man dying of thirst wants water?

But you will notice that "hunger" and "thirst" occur daily. Psalm 42:1-2 says, "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." Child of God, do you have a daily desire to be more like Jesus?

It is a biological fact that every living thing hungers and thirsts. Only the dead and dying are without appetite. They want no food. They crave no water. When we feel bad and go to the doctor, usually the first question he asks us is, "How is your appetite?" Loss of appetite is nature's way of telling us that something is wrong with us!

When we lack an appetite for spiritual things, which is the basis of happiness, it is not because we are too sophisticated or too intellectual to accept God's standard of righteousness. It is because we are too spiritually anemic to know we are dying.

Jesus was asking His audience by the Sea of Galilee - and those of us in this service today - "How is your appetite for right living?"

I am afraid that America is getting to the place where we hunger and thirst for everything but righteousness. We hunger for drink, drugs, and sex and material things. Greed is the spirit of this age. **Our flesh is out of control and we want more, more, more.**

Many of our youth are turning to Satanism and witchcraft. Abortion clinics have become our moral battlegrounds. **Medical experts predict that**

twenty million of us will be dying from AIDS by the year 2010. Economists write about the collapse of capitalism that could result from the loss of an entire generation that has been killed by abortion or by AIDS.

Why is all of this happening to America? It is the direct result of our appetite. It is time to hunger and thirst after righteousness. Let me remind you that Proverbs 14:34 tell us that "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people." God has spoken these words in 2 Chronicles 7:14, "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

The secret of happiness lies not in doing what we want to do but in doing what we ought to do. Ladies and gentlemen, sin leads to unhappiness! If you want an unhappy marriage, you just let that marriage get chocked full of infidelity, alcoholism, hatred and bitterness. **If you want to be unhappy on your job, you just start being immoral, dishonest, and deceitful.** You will become absolutely miserable and, ultimately, your career will be wrecked. If you want to be unhappy as an individual, just start following the pathway of sin. **Your life will become filled with guilt, tension and misery.** Why? Because *SIN* leads to unhappiness!

You see, apart from the apparent results, sin causes the Christian to be unhappy because of our relationship to the Lord. To understand that, we must realize that Christianity is not philosophy, it is not ethics, it is not social action. Christianity is basically a loving relationship, comparable to marriage. It is the commitment of love - two people to each other - Jesus Christ and you, or me. A loving relationship.

Romans 5:8 reminds us "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." **The Christian experience is when we commit ourselves in love to Jesus Christ because He first loved us.** The cross experience is when we stand before the cross and suddenly realize that God so loved the world that he sent His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, who died for our sins - who took into His own body the penalty and punishment for my sins. When I see that love so amazing, so divine, I stand before Him and say, "If He so loved me, I must love Him with all my heart and all my life."

To be a Christian means that there came a time in your life when you realized that you were lost and on your way to hell, and you asked Jesus

Christ to come into your life, forgive you of your sins, and believed that He did. And in that salvation experience you committed your life and your love, your sins and all that you are, just as you are, to Jesus Christ and accepted and received His love in return - it is a loving relationship!

You see, when the way of sin becomes a way of life for us, we loose our fellowship with God, and, therefore, we loose our sense of direction for our life!

Novelist George Moore tells of Irish peasants, during the Depression, who were put to work by the government building roads. For a time the peasants worked hard, singing under the hot sun, happy to be employed again.

But little by little they realized that the road that they were building lead to nowhere. They had been put to work merely to give the government a rationale for feeding them. In light of that truth, they lost their vision for working, and their singing soon stopped.

George Moore wrote this conclusion, "The roads to nowhere are difficult to make. For a man to work well and sing, there must be an end in view." **There must be a sense of direction.**

Let me ask you something today, child of God. Has some sin in your life caused you to loose the sense of God's direction for your life? Is your marriage suffering because of some hidden sin in your life? Have you lost the joy of the Lord in your heart and the smile of happiness from your face because of sin in your life?

God said this in Isaiah 55:1-2, "Come, all 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. 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."

Are you looking for real happiness? When you hunger and thirst after righteousness as desperately as a starving man does food, you will find it. Christianity is not just a feeling; it is a living faith. It is not a sensation; it is salvation. **It is not a religion; it is righteousness.** Christianity is a loving relationship with Jesus Christ as your personal Savior!

Are you saved? Why not?

Everyone please stand for prayer.

Father,

Forgive me for being complacent in my desire for righteousness. Give me the courage to put You first in the actions and activities. In Jesus name. Amen.