

Title: Happy are the Hungry
Text: Matthew 5.6
Theme: Longing for God
Series: Matthew #15
Prop Stmtnt: Only those who are desperate for God will one day, not be desperate

Read Text:

Michael was an athlete. Like many guys in his high school, his talent and strength gave him a sense of respect from some, envy from some, and a personal sense of glory. He went to church, but that was about it. Seriously, when people are making much of you, that does not help you make a compelling case for you to make much of Jesus. Who needs Jesus when your little world treats you like god? If people think that you are great, who are you to disagree? So, when Michael heard these words from the Sermon on the Mount, one day when he attended church with his family, they seemed like a joke. This was not how his world worked. The world did not belong to the humble, the mourning, the meek or those who were desperate for righteousness. It belonged to those who would grab what life offered and not let go. Michael's experience in high school led him to the conclusion that the Bible was full of pious platitudes that might sound nice on Hallmark cards for old ladies, but this old book was completely irrelevant to real life.

Michael joined the army and fit very well into a cocky infantry airborne combat battalion. But one night, it all changed. Earlier that day, Michael and his battalion fought in a particularly intense fight. In his words, he killed gleefully that day, ripping out the lives of other young men without even a twinge of remorse. But that night while on guard duty he sat under a star-studded sky in a Vietnam jungle and relived the day's events from a different perspective. He had killed others. He took the lives of men. Do you know what it is like to hold a human life in your hand; to squeeze a trigger and send someone into eternity; to rob a mother of her son, a wife of her husband, and children of their daddy? Fair enough, it was war - right? But he did it with hatred. He did it with glee. On that day he was not fighting for an ideal or a principle, it was all about him, plain and simple. And as he realized the enormity of what he had done and, even right then how close to death he was, he became overwhelmed with his guilt. What would he do or say when called before God? What do you do when you realize the weight of your sin? That night, Michael finally began to realize that he was empty and he was scared.

Now, in Michael's defense, if you just hear these words of Jesus, called the Beatitudes, and you do not listen to the rest of the sermon that Jesus preached and the rest of the story about his life, then, taken out of their context, they do not make sense. It sounds as if Jesus saying that the unhappy people are really happy and that the happy people are really unhappy. Of course that sounds crazy. But, that is not what Jesus is saying. We see happiness as a feeling from circumstances that are going our way. Jesus is making it clear that true happiness is the by-product of being under the favor of God. Happiness that comes from circumstances is temporary, vulnerable, and fickle and it will betray you. But if you are blessed that is, if you have the approval and favor of God, you are blessed with a condition that will produce a happiness that cannot be taken from you.

Jonathan Edwards was a pastor in New England in the early 1700's. He was a world-class theologian and one of the greatest contributions that this country has made to the gospel. And yet, Jonathan was let go from the church that he pastored for many years. It was a crushing blow and yet it was said that in the days before he was scheduled to preach his final sermon at his church in Northampton, MA that he had a happiness that was out of the reach of his enemies. They could not take, tamper with, or even touch his happiness. This is what Christ is describing here. He is saying that his people reflect these qualities. They do not do it perfectly, but these are characteristics of their lives.

I remind you that this is the beginning of the first sermon that Jesus preached. In this sermon he exposes the futility of a superficial and self-centered life because he has come to deliver us from ourselves. He has come to deliver us from our sin. He has come to deliver us to a new reality, a new kingdom, a new identify. In order to do that he is exposing the lies of our world, that are the lies of our own hearts. He takes on our assumptions that we have turned into rules such as:

- 1) If you are popular with others, you are cool with God.
- 2) If you keep the code, God will cut you some slack.
- 3) You know that God favors you if you have stuff.
- 4) If others respect you, God must like you.
- 5) If you know all of the right answers, then you are fine.

Jesus is not impressed. He knows the truth, and that is threatening. Here, Jesus is pronouncing a blessing upon those who are poor in spirit, mourn, meek and hunger and thirst for righteousness. Jesus will go on to say, that even though your world may hate you and spit on you and puke toxic waste on you, God is pronouncing that you are under his divine favor. Just because you enjoy the favor of man, does not mean that you have the favor of God. The blessing that Jesus is speaking about is given to the losers who know they are losers and cry out for mercy. The woe is given to those who think they are ok and have no need of God.

1. **The Desperate are blessed if they are desperate for the right things.** (6a)

The Battle for Sheria was fought between British and Turkish forces in World War I in the Palestinian desert. Major Vivian Glibert described the desperate condition of the British soldiers in his book, "The Last Crusade." He said,

"Our heads ached. Our eyes became bloodshot and dim in the blinding glare Our tongues began to swell... our lips turned purplish black and burst. Those who dropped out of the column were never seen again, but the desperate force battled on to Sheria. There were wells at Sheria, and had they been unable to take the place by nightfall, thousands were doomed to die of thirst. We fought that day as men fight for their lives. We entered Sheria's station on the heels of the retreating Turks. The first objects which met our view were the great stone cisterns full of cold, clear drinking water It took four hours before the last man had his drink of water." To hunger and thirst means to crave that which you must have in order to live. People who are truly hungry and thirsty are desperate.

a. **Are you desperate?**

You were made by God to long for something. What should be a longing for God has been twisted by sin to be a longing to be God. This is why we crave self-promotion. We are desperate to be affirmed, to be noticed, to be appreciated, to be respected, to be adored, to be...worshipped. We love questions that allow us to tell others what we know. (omniscience) We love challenges that allow us to present our skills (omnipotence). We love to be the hero so we can be well-thought of and respected. But, the pursuit of self-glory is like drinking salt water, it will never satisfy.

Do you remember the story of Haman from the book of Esther? Haman had risen to the #2 position in the Medo-Persian Empire. When he appeared in the streets of Susa, the people would all bow down to him. That is, all of them but one. This one, Mordecai, infuriated Haman. In spite of how wealthy and powerful he had risen to be, he was not satisfied. The pursuit of self-glory is a dark and disillusioning journey. You never reach the destination. You hunger for something that you can never get.

Do you long for the respect of your peers? Do you long to be well thought of and accepted by your spouse's family? Do you long to be loved and affirmed by your children? I cannot promise you that your peers will ever respect you, or that your spouse's family will ever accept you, or that your children will ever affirm you. So, yes, I know that you are desperate. So am I. We are needy people. Our problem is that we do not realize what our true need is. We think that in order to be happy we need to be appreciated, or we need to be loved, or we need to be secure, or we need to be comforted, or we need to be healthy, or we need to be athletic, or we need to be smart. And since we do not know the true nature of our need, we desperately pursue the wrong things. For too many, they waste an entire life running after something that they can never get.

b. What are you pursuing?

What are you desperate for? What Jesus says here is so powerful and so ironic, all at the same time. We think that we will be happy, if we experience pleasure. So, we pursue pleasure. We will throw away our families, our marriages, our jobs and careers, in order to pursue pleasure but we never attain it. We have, what we think at the moment are tastes of it, when in reality, those tastes are simply the coils of the boa constrictor wrapping themselves tighter and tighter around our soul. Why? Because we pursue happiness instead of pursuing righteousness. If you pursue happiness, you will find misery. If you pursue righteousness you will be satisfied.

I am afraid that this may sound a bit confining to some of you. So, let me say a word about hungering and thirsting, being desperate and pursuing, before I speak to the word "righteousness." There are so many appetites that we have, that are good in and of themselves, but can become monsters that own us. Food is a wonderful gift that God has given us. Aren't you glad that God did not make us like cars? Gasoline tastes awful. If you have ever had to siphon some gas and you have gotten the taste in your mouth, it is nasty. No, God gave us the sensation of hunger and he gave us the gift of food to satisfy that hunger. Not only that, but God gave us so much variety of food so that we can satisfy our hunger in unlimited ways. However, (and this is a big however), there are some serious warnings that come with that. We can eat the wrong types of food, or too much food, or food that is not prepared well. We can develop food allergies and

reactions that can range from uncomfortable to life-threatening. We can become slaves to food if we make food an idol that we worship.

So, when Jesus says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness” he is inviting us to pursue something that you never have to show any restraint in your pursuit. If you are pursuing physical fitness, you can over do it. If you are pursuing education, it can consume you. If you are pursuing a career, you can sacrifice your family for it. If you are pursuing hedonistic pleasure, you can destroy your body with addiction to drugs, with STD’s, with bondage to alcohol. If you are pursuing stuff, you can lose it all. And people would be loving and right to caution you and warn you about the road you are on. But, if you are pursuing righteousness, if you are craving that, you can never pursue that too much. It was the Psalmist who invited us to the table and said, “Taste and see that the Lord is good.” (Ps. 34.8) When you come to faith in Christ, you are not given new rules, you are given new delights. You are given new treasures to seek. Longing for the right things (righteousness) comes from God changing your appetite. God uses the dissatisfaction of what you are pursuing to reveal the futility of continuing on that course. But most will not admit it. They are trapped by the lies. But if you have eyes to see, you can see that you are empty. This will bring about grief and remorse over time wasted and life unfulfilled, but then what? Do you just live with regret? No, This is not just mourning over the past but longing for the future righteousness. So, what is this righteousness that we are to crave?

3 aspects of righteousness:

- 1) Legal righteousness (forensic) imputed - salvation
- 2) Moral righteousness, Personal ethical righteousness, moral purity - sanctification
- 3) Social righteousness - The reign of righteousness, era of rightness, peace, security, justice, Kingdom of Christ - glorification

This week, we have been grateful that the three girls kidnapped in Cleveland have been freed. At the same time we are very angry at what this man did to these girls. This grieving for, this longing for justice, for righteousness, for security, and for peace is part of what Jesus is talking about. We wish that we did not have to stand on the front porch and watch our kids. We wish that when we lost sight of them for a minute or two that adrenaline and fear would not overwhelm our entire being and grip us with momentary terror. But, this longing for righteousness is not just craving for a world that is righteous, it does deeper than that. This means to crave to be free from every form of self-promotion that we have. Desperately desiring righteousness means to long for the day when from sin, we have been set free, when every form of our pride and self-worship is gone, when we are not promoting ourselves, or drawing attention to ourselves, or sulking in the corner. Hungering and thirsting for righteousness is craving the day when our salvation is complete, when we are practically empty of self and completely full of God. That day is coming, and when it does...

2. **The Desperate are blessed because they alone will be satisfied.** (6b)

Hunger and thirst do not come and go. Hunger and thirst come and increase and increase and do not stop until they are satisfied. The prodigal son was hungry and ate some corn shucks, but when he was starving, he went home to his Father.

That night, sitting in the jungle in Vietnam, Michael Wilke realized he was hungry. It wasn't his body; it was his soul. He was empty. He was guilty. He was conflicted. He needed forgiveness. He needed righteousness. And now, nothing else mattered. What started out that night as a desire became a desperate quest. Two years later he came to faith in Christ.

The pastor and early church theologian, Augustine, described his conversion to Christ as the triumph of sovereign joy. He said,

“How sweet all at once it was for me to be rid of those fruitless joys which I had once feared to lose . . .! You drove them from me, you who are the true, the sovereign joy. You drove them from me and took their place, you who are sweeter than all pleasure, though not to flesh and blood, you who outshine all light, yet are hidden deeper than any secret in our hearts, you who surpass all honor, though not in the eyes of men who see all honor in themselves. . . . O Lord my God, my Light, my Wealth, and my Salvation.”

Augustine said that God took what he used to hunger for and replaced it with himself.

Thomas Watson, back in 1692 said that God considers himself to be more glorified when we pursue our happiness in his salvation. He said,

“Would it not be an encouragement to a subject, to hear his prince say to him, You will honor and please me very much, if you will go to yonder mine of gold, and dig as much gold for yourself as you can carry away? So, for God to say, Go...get as much grace as you can, dig out as much salvation as you can; and the more happiness you have, the more I shall count myself glorified.”

Do you see what Jesus is doing here? He is not only describing the person who is part of his kingdom, but he is doing it in such a way that he is inviting his hearers to crave righteousness with every appetite of their being because if they do, it will drive them straight to Christ. To pursue righteousness is to pursue Christ. To crave righteousness is to crave Christ. Christ is the only means by which we can be rescued from the penalty of our sin and declared righteous in the eyes of God.

This blessing is yours only by faith in Christ. You must trust in Christ. You must recognize that you are a sinner who cannot rescue himself, no matter how much “good” you do. You must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as your King and Savior. When you do a great transaction takes place. When you repent of your sin, Christ takes your sin from you and takes credit for having committed them (which is why he died). And simultaneously as you believe in Christ,

Christ is the One who not only saves, but he keeps us. We are in him and are made complete in him and will one day experience complete freedom from sin in us and complete freedom from sin around us. The entire earth will be filled with the glory of God. And on that day, we will experience life as it was designed by God to be lived. We will perfectly believe everything that God says. We will perfectly enjoy God and be enjoyed by God and will enjoy the people of God and we will be a joy to the people of God. On that day, every appetite will be satisfied, every

need met, every desire fulfilled, every goal accomplished, every dream realized. And, it will never end.

But, there is a warning that is implied in this verse. If the craving of righteousness is the means of complete satisfaction, because of Christ, then what would the craving of anything else bring about? Do you see what I am trying to say? The opposite of a blessing is a woe. Woe is on the person who hungers and thirsts, but not after righteousness, because that person will be damned to exist forever with desires that will never be met.

There is no middle ground between those whose hunger for righteousness drives them to Christ and those who try to find satisfaction in anything else, even if it is religion.