

Sermon preached at Woodbury Community Church, Woodbury, MN on Sunday, January 23, 2011, by Rev. Brian D. Schulenburg

**MATTHEW 5:6**

<sup>6</sup> Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

**THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT: LIVING AS CITIZENS OF GOD'S KINGDOM #4**  
**YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT**

Today, my Chicago Bears play the Green Bay Packers for the NFC Championship. By the time the day is over, one of these two great teams will be playing in the Super Bowl. Earlier this week, I was meeting with Dr. Bill Drehmel, a die-hard Packer fan. While meeting with him, Mark Wallis, the former chairman of our mission board who has moved to Duluth, sent me an e-mail containing this picture. I just had to share it with you today. (Instinct Poster with two babies, one in a Bear jersey and one in a Packer jersey) That's about all I'm going to say about the game until 2:00 this afternoon.

I remember a time, years ago, when I was in the desert of Guatemala. We had brought a team of about 75 people with us to Central America for the purpose of sharing the Gospel through a variety of means. We used basketball, children's ministry, mime, medical teams and building teams to make a tremendous impact on the people of that region. This particular year was extremely hot. Mid-day temperatures were well over 100 degrees with scorching heat producing uncomfortable results for the members of our team.

Those who were dressed for mime performances were quickly giving way to heat exhaustion. Electrolytes were administered and most of the students did just fine, but the star of the play, the guy who had the role of Jesus, a 6' 5" senior in high school wasn't responding well to treatment. He finally became stabilized and kept talking about how thirsty he was. He hadn't been drinking his water for a couple of days, because there was no ice, and he always had ice at home. He had no idea how much danger he was putting himself in. He was literally dying of thirst.

Have you had a time like that in your life? A time where your body was so thirsty, or perhaps so hungry, that you could do little but think about food and water? Maybe it wasn't because of being in the heat of the desert. Maybe you were just exercising on a hot day, or had a job that required you to work outside in brutal heat. When I was the Senior High Pastor at Wooddale we used to take students to Lake Calhoun in Minneapolis to pass out water bottles to those who were running, rollerblading or biking around the lake. There is nothing like refreshing water when your throat is parched. People continually asked, "What's the catch? Where are you from? Why are you giving us this water?" And the students responded, "There is no catch. We just wanted to show you God's love in a practical way. Have a great day." We rarely shared which church we were from because we wanted the people to see Jesus, not some church.

The imagery of thirst and hunger and God have always gone hand in hand.

In the Old Testament, David wrote about this.

Psalm 63:1 says, “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.”

Do you get the idea that David was familiar with that type of terrain? What David is talking about here is an intense thirst, an intense longing. This past summer, we spent some time in En Gedi. It is that location in Israel, near the Dead Sea, where David sought refuge when he was being hunted down by King Saul and his men. It is a ferocious land. There are poison snakes, there is very little water, the Dead Sea that is nearby has the highest salt concentration in the world, thus making it impossible for anything to live in it. En Gedi is an oasis in the desert. There is a spring of water that could very well be called a spring of living water, that flows in a spot where there is no other suitable drinking water. I know when we were in En Gedi, we were thirsty! Our water bottles were close to empty by the time we left, and we desperately wanted water. David says that is how we are to thirst for God!

In Psalm 107:8-9, the Psalmist wrote, “8 Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men, 9 for he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.”

So, why the talk about hunger and thirst? Because on this fourth week of our series through Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount we come to the fourth Beatitude; it’s found in Matthew 5:6, which says, “6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”

If I were to ask you to be completely honest with me and tell me what it is that your soul thirsts for, what would you say? That little voice in your head has already given you the answer, hasn’t it? You can’t deny the fact that you know what it is that you have been seeking.

Listen, fact number one today is that everyone is looking for happiness. Everyone!

We’ve said it before as we have searched through these beatitudes. Another word for blessed is happy. Jesus is giving us the secret to happiness in these beatitudes. The person who is truly happy is the one who experiences the favor of God in his or her life. That is what it means to be blessed. And, the happy person is the one who seeks after the things of God.

Martyn Lloyd Jones said something profound about happiness, “Now the whole world is seeking for happiness; there is no question about that. Everybody wants to be happy. That is the great motive behind every act and ambition, behind all work and all striving and

effort. Everything is designed for happiness. But the great tragedy of the world is that, though it gives itself to seek for happiness, it never seems to be able to find it. The present state of the world reminds us of that very forcibly. What is the matter? I think the answer is that we have never understood this text as we should have done. 'Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness.' What does it mean? Let me put it negatively like this. We are not to hunger and thirst after blessedness; we are not to hunger and thirst after happiness. But that is what most people are doing. We put happiness and blessedness as the one thing that we desire, and thus we always miss it; it always eludes us. According to the Scriptures happiness is never something that should be sought directly; it is always something that results from seeking something else."<sup>1</sup>

Profound, isn't it? How many of us are pursuing happiness, instead of righteousness?

Let me give you a few sure fire ways to see if you are pursuing the wrong thing:

- 1) Do you spend hours daydreaming about the stuff you don't have that you think that you need to have in order to have the life you've always dreamed of?
- 2) Do you find it difficult to celebrate the success of others?
- 3) Does your meaning in life come from what you do instead of who you are or better yet Whose you are?
- 4) Is there a pursuit in your life that is greater than God?

If so, you are pursuing the wrong things. Remember to be blessed means to be approved by God. Those whom God approves are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. So, what does it mean to hunger and thirst for righteousness?

Jones writes, ". . . the desire for righteousness, the act of hungering and thirsting for it, means ultimately the desire to be free from sin in all its forms and in its every manifestation. . . It means a desire to be free from sin, because sin separates us from God. Therefore, positively, it means a desire to be right with God; and that, after all, is the fundamental thing. All the trouble in the world today is due to the fact that man is not right with God, for it is because he is not right with God that he has gone wrong everywhere else."<sup>2</sup>

How serious are you about getting rid of the sin in your life? To be righteous is to have God's grace placed upon you. It means that we strive to live for Christ. It is that deep theological term *sanctification*, which is the process of being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount: Second Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), p. 63.

<sup>2</sup> Jones, p. 65.

Jones goes on to write the following, “But it also means of necessity a desire to be free from the power of sin. Having realized what it means to be poor in spirit and to mourn because of sin within, we naturally come to the stage of longing to be free from the power of sin. . . but it goes further still. It means a desire to be free from the very desire for sin, because we find that the man who truly examines himself in the light of the Scriptures not only discovers that he is in bondage of sin; still more horrible is the fact that he likes it, that he wants it.”<sup>3</sup>

“To hunger and thirst after righteousness is to desire to be free from self in all its horrible manifestations, in all its forms. When we considered the man who is meek, we saw all that really means is that he is free from self in its every shape and from – self-concern, pride, boasting, self-protection, sensitiveness, always imagining people are against him, a desire to protect self and glorify self. That is what leads to quarrels between individuals, that is what leads to quarrels between nations; self-assertion. Now the man who hungers and thirsts after righteousness is a man who longs to be free from all of that; he wants to be emancipated from self-concern in every shape and form.”<sup>4</sup>

“To hunger and thirst after righteousness is nothing but the longing to be positively holy. I cannot think of a better way of defining it.”<sup>5</sup>

To hunger and thirst after righteousness is nothing but the longing to be positively holy! That is a great definition. How is your appetite for holiness today?

J.N. Darby said, “To be hungry is not enough; I must be really starving to know what is in His heart towards me. . . When the prodigal son was hungry he went to feed upon husks, but when he was starving, he turned to his father.”<sup>6</sup>

We will never see our desire for happiness fulfilled apart from the work of God in our lives. It is a work that begins at the moment of salvation when He justifies us, and will not be completed until we enter heaven, when we shall no longer be subject to the impact of sin on our lives. I want to be a man who hungers after the things of God. How about you?

This Beatitude like all of the others is a paradox. Kent Hughes phrases the paradox this way, “It suggests that those who continually hunger are satisfied. Yet, how can one be hungry and satisfied at the same time? Of how can one be satisfied and experience hunger? Satisfied but never satisfied? Full yet empty? Content but discontent?”<sup>7</sup>

Every year at Vacation Bible School here at Woodbury Community Church, Penny LaVick bakes her famous rolls. The church becomes saturated with the scent of scintillating treats

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<sup>3</sup> Jones, pp. 65-66.

<sup>4</sup> Jones, p. 66.

<sup>5</sup> Jones, p. 66

<sup>6</sup> Jones, p. 68.

<sup>7</sup> Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Message of the Kingdom*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway books, 2001), p. 42.

baking in the two church ovens. The traffic around the kitchen becomes a whole lot more busy that day. Adults become like children who try to sneak a cookie when mom's not watching, only in this case they try to steal one of Penny's rolls when she isn't looking. There is nothing like those rolls. When she bakes them, I can hardly concentrate. I'll sit in my office, trying to concentrate on the phone call or the meeting or the study time, only to have my thoughts wander time and again to those delicious rolls. If you've been here for Vacation Bible School, you know what I'm talking about. On that day, there is nothing that you want more. There is no food that will satisfy you more. There is no scent that has ever tempted you as much as those rolls. So, do you know what I do on that day? I get out my office, sneak into the kitchen and grab a roll, And on that roll is some incredible honey-butter spread that makes it so good. When I bite into that roll, guess what happens. I'm completely satisfied. And that satisfaction lasts for about ten minutes. And then, I want another roll. Sounds good right now, doesn't it? It sounds really good.

If I could have one of those rolls today, I'd be satisfied for a while. And that is the cycle that Jesus describes to His disciples. The more we feast on Him, the more satisfied we will be. And, the more time we spend with Him, the more time we will want to spend with Him.

Great athletes understand this principle. The more you work out, the more you want to work out. The opposite is also true. The more time you spend away from the gym, the easier it becomes to stay away from the gym. The opposite is true in our spiritual lives too. Stay away from God, and it become easier and easier to let that which ought to be priority number one slide. Get back into pursuing righteousness, and you'll see that Christ is the source of true happiness.

There is an old saying that many of you have heard. "You are what you eat." Eat Twinkies and cupcakes and pizza and burgers and not much else and you are going to pay the price with your body. Eat a healthy diet, exercise and take care of yourself and you'll reap the rewards. That which is true in your physical life is even truer in your spiritual life.

Perhaps nowhere is this demonstrated as beautifully in the Bible as in the story of the woman at the well. Her story is found in John 4. Jesus is on His way back to Galilee from Jerusalem, and in order to get there He has to cut through the land of Samaria. Most Jewish people would have gone out of their way to avoid Samaria because these were the enemies of the Jewish people. But, Jesus loves all people. So, he not only goes through Samaria, stopping at a Samaritan town called Sychar, He then does something really unthinkable, He strikes up a conversation with a Samaritan woman. Pick up the reading in verse seven.

7 When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" 8 (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

9 The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

11 "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? 12 Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?"

13 Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

Jesus had huge plans for the woman at the well. She didn't understand yet, but in a couple minutes, Jesus would turn her world upside down. Jesus knew what the life of this woman was like. She had multiple men in her life who she had allowed to use her. She was living with a guy who wasn't her husband. She was breaking Old Testament law after Old Testament law. But, Jesus saw something in her. He wanted to meet her in her area of need. So, he begins by intriguing her. He talks about the gift of God and living water, and she is confused. How are you going to give me living water? Almost telling Jesus that he sounded arrogant, the woman says, "Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his flocks and herds?"

She began to catch the Old Testament imagery that Jesus was drawing from. Throughout the Old Testament, the Lord refers to Himself as living water. It's a contrast to the stagnant water that stood in Jacob's well. Living water is a picture of the flowing water of a brook or stream or river.

In Jeremiah 2:13, God calls himself "the spring of living water." In Psalm 36:9 David, speaking of God, says, "For with you is the fountain of life." Isaiah 55:1 says, "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters," and Psalm 42:1 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."

The woman was panting for God. Her soul longed for God. She had tried to fill her life with everything but God, and needed Him more than she knew. She must have thought to herself that Jesus was talking about God being the only one that could satisfy the desires of her heart. What she didn't get yet was that Jesus was saying that He was the one that was God and could meet this need. She challenged Jesus by asking him if he was greater than Jacob.

Harry Ironside wrote, "Jesus might have said to her, 'Greater than Jacob! My poor woman, did you ever read in the first book of Moses the story of your father Jacob, as you call him, how on one night he had sent his family and flocks across the ford, and he was bowed in

prayer alone, when there came to him a mysterious Personality, with whom Jacob struggled all night. Then the unknown one said, 'Let Me go, for the day breaketh,' and Jacob said, 'I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me.' Jesus might have said to the woman, 'Do you remember that story? Well, I am the One who met Jacob there in the darkness and overcame his stubborn will.' But I am afraid that if He told her that, she would have shrunk from Him, thinking that He was insane. Instead of alarming her, He sought to reach her heart and conscious.'"<sup>8</sup>

Do you get what's going on here? I have people who come to me all of the time who think that God must hate them. They are ashamed of their past. They feel like they can't measure up to God's standards. They feel like there is no way that God could forgive them for what they have done. What did Jesus do with the woman? He offered her Himself. He offered her the only thing that can truly satisfy.

So, how do we become people who hunger and thirst for righteousness?

- 1) Recognize that we are a people with starving, malnourished souls apart from God.
- 2) Read the menu – There is only one item on it for the person approved by God and that item is righteousness
- 3) Attack Righteousness Like You'd Attack Penny's Rolls – Devour it like you are starving, as a person who is dying of thirst

I wanted to help you remember the urgency with which we are to hunger and thirst for righteousness today. And, I could think of no better way than to have Penny bake those rolls. Throughout the morning, you may have smelled the aroma of freshly baked bread. In just a moment, we are going to give everyone an opportunity to eat one of Penny's rolls. Chances are, you'll be very satisfied for about three minutes. May God give us a great craving for righteousness!

I want to close with this quote from Kent Hughes, "The language of this Beatitude does not make sense to the modern ear. Indeed, it is too strong for some Christians. It rules out sleek, self-satisfied, halfhearted religion. In fact, hungering and thirsting for righteousness is the only approach the Beatitude accepts."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Harry Ironside, "Addresses on the Gospel of John," (Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, Inc., 1942), p. 142.

<sup>9</sup> Hughes, p. 41.