

Community Church of Issaquah
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To Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness
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Matthew writes it well in the fifth chapter of his Gospel when we quotes Jesus delivering the Sermon on the Mount. Here's what Jesus says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." I must confess I hadn't thought very much about that until I began working on sermons for the Lenten Season and was trying to follow the lectionary suggested topics and Scriptures. There it was, the concept of being hungry and thirsty, but not for food or water, but righteousness – or being in the right relationship with God.

As you can well imagine, there have been very few times in my life that I have gone without food or beverage (as a Southern boy, that would be sweet tea). I can't speak for you, but perhaps you might fall into the same category of having been fed well. So why would Jesus use that language when he was teaching those who were struggling with leaving their own faith traditions and placing all their belief in him? I had to think about that for a few minutes.

Jesus put these two terms together, probably indicating something that we yearn for with all our being. We do not just hunger, we equally thirst; it is what we pursue with all our might. Such would be what we throw ourselves into it, and this quest takes precedence over everything else. The word "hungering" means the idea of wanting desperately; to

long for; to famish, and to crave. To crave or seek with eager desire, this is a passionate hunger. Such is far more than the person who just wants a nibble, but rather this is the person who is starving.

Observe that the promise of being “filled” is conditional. Only those who pursue righteousness as a passion will end up full or satisfied. This means that pursuing God now and then, here and there; hot at one moment and cold at the next will only end in disappointment. Not merely a disappointment at the judgment, but disappointment in this life as well. Unless I pursue God, His truth, and holiness with a passion, I will end up not enjoying my walk as a Christian. I know that some early Jews in the day of Christ were content and satisfied in their spiritual lukewarm condition, yet I have often seen in some individuals that such a contentment does not appear to last over a lifetime. Spiritual half-heartedness always seems to catch up to a person, even in this life. The blissful ignorance of former years will not prepare me for the temptations and challenges waiting in the next stage in my life. When life throws us a curve, we are not ready and have nothing to fall back upon that is sure and solid.

Jesus clarifies what should be the true object of our desires, because one can spend the entirety of one’s life hungering and thirsting after all sorts of things. To hunger and thirst for righteousness is completely within the ability of the human race, because we constantly see people putting all of themselves into far less goals. Think about what Paul write in the Book of Acts: “Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in

nothing other than telling or hearing something new” (Acts 17:21).

In First Corinthians, chapter 9, Paul spoke of Olympic athletes pursuing an earthly reward with all their being. Jesus gave a parable concerning a buyer of pearls, who when he found the one great pearl was instantly willing to liquidate every other pearl he owned, in fact the text says that he sold “all that he had”, to joyfully purchase it (Matthew 13:45). One can also throw their entire being into pursuing sin.

In the parable of the unjust steward, Jesus pointed out the sad fact that often people who are unbelievers will put far more effort and forethought into pursuing some earthly goal or reward than some believers put forth in pursuing a relationship with God and eternal life. “For the sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light” (Luke 16:8).

The Bible is filled with examples of those who are hungry and thirsting after God. Do you spend much time reading the Psalms? Next time you have your Bible in your hands, read Psalm 42. It begins this way: “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God.” Whether this is the work of David or someone else, it clearly indicates the deep desire to know and experience God to the fullest.

In this Psalm, appearing before God meant returning to the temple on Mount Zion, and worshipping God. Every

Israelite male was required to go to Jerusalem three times a year for the major festivals and the writer was evidently unable to do this. In addition, he apparently was unable to perform his tasks at the temple. Some writers suggest that this psalm was written by a Levite who was being taken into captivity. We don't know if that was the case, but the main theme is clear – to seek God in the fullest.

Follow the main theme of hungering and thirsting, which stresses that the person who will end up saved is the person who *keeps on* hungering after God and His truth. In the Beatitude we heard earlier, Jesus challenges our real desire for goodness. 'Are you intensely and sharply fixed on your need for true righteousness so much so that you would die unless you get it? Just how badly do you want to be righteous? Questions like that criticize our satisfaction with partial goodness, halfway accomplishment, and only partly kept promises to be good.

When one is hungering and thirsting after righteousness, one realizes:

- Just being a good moral person is not enough.
- God's standards cannot be compromised, for His truth is our only guide to eternal life.
- Any issue that God has addressed is a big issue. This means that when one is hungering and thirsting after righteousness, one does not neglect public worship, and neither does one try to see how close one can get to sin or error without sinning.
- In this sermon Jesus reveals that God's standard of righteousness goes far beyond just marginal conformity, but includes inward purity and the right

dealing in our relationships. Hungering and thirsting after righteousness will include hungering after meeting God's expectations as a believer of His.

- It also includes putting the things of God ahead of all other things and relationships.
- This is when we view as our real treasure, the one thing we should never want to lose; our relationship with Him God.

Jeremiah in his Biblical story and Jesus (the Prodigal Son) both stressed the point that outside of God – life is a barren desert, a withered landscape, where men and women are depicted as dazed, empty and dying creatures. The clear warning in advance is that any attempt to fill our lives with meaning and purpose, or any attempt to feed our souls with earthly things or pursuits will end in an inner and despairing emptiness.

You live long enough, and you try this and that and nothing seems to ever fill you up. You start wondering if life is playing some kind of cruel joke on you, that it keeps getting your hopes up only to disappoint. Yet Jesus promised that in our hunger and thirsting that we, "*Shall be filled*".

The end of the Christian life is not one of disappointment or disillusionment. The person who keeps centered on God and His word will overcome all obstacles, will find the answers to questions pertaining to their relationship with God, and will find fulfillment and satisfaction in serving God. Yet in all this searching and striving, the values and standards of Jesus are in direct conflict with the commonly

accepted values and standards of the world. The world judges the rich to be blessed, not the poor, whether in the material or in the spiritual world. It seems more like this is where the thirst and hunger are filled:

- The happy-go-lucky and carefree, not those who take evil so seriously that they mourn over it;
- the strong and pushy, not the meek and gentle;
- the full not the hungry;
- those who mind their own business and are doing things like 'showing mercy' and 'making peace', not those who meddle in other men's matters and occupy their time causing harm;
- those who attain their desires even if it was necessary to do it by devious means, not the pure in heart who refuse to compromise their integrity;
- those who are secure and popular, and live at ease, not those who have to suffer persecution.

So, let me ask this question as we close, do we want to have our hunger and thirst truly filled or are we satisfied when we are left empty or even half-empty, not only in this life, but for eternity as well? As Jesus promised, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled."