

**The Way of Jesus: When a Big Appetite is Good**  
**Matthew 5:6**

**I. Introduction – When You Really Want It!**

We all have them. Cravings for that certain special food or beverage that you really like. I remember taking a hike on a hot spring day in the Grand Canyon. It was only about four miles, but the weather was hot and dry and, with it being such a short hike, we didn't take any water with us. Well, it may have only been four miles, but the two miles back up were very steep and the weather was dry. A can of 7-up out of the pop machine never tasted so good. I still remember it forty years ago.

Probably the worst craving I had – and it was “worst” on many levels” – was for a Big Mac after my first trip to Kenya. Kenya is a beautiful country and the people are even more so. But the food...well, let's just say my mother taught me to eat what was put in front of me. I didn't eat it because I really liked it. I know. I'm a spoiled American. I admit it. But after two weeks of plain white bread and butter for breakfast and boiled cabbage, tough meat (all the meat there is tough) stew, potatoes, and tea every day, I was craving the Golden Arches. For twenty-four hours on the plane ride home, I could just taste the secret sauce in my mouth. First place I went as soon as I landed in Minneapolis.

I'm over it now...

I'm sure you've had your cravings. Probably a lot better than my story, too. But craving for foods and beverages we like is nothing like the hunger and thirst that much of the world knows. Action Against Hunger says that *global hunger afflicts more than a billion people*. The same number – *nearly a billion – people do not have access to clean drinking water*.

The world of Jesus' day was much more like the Third World than our comfortable culture. We don't worry that much about our food and drink. In Jesus' day, it was a daily concern, and sometimes it was a matter of life or death. These people knew from experience that they could not live without food and drink. Most of us have never come close to starving. But most of the

people gathered around Jesus on the day that he delivered the Sermon on the Mount knew real hunger. So when he said,

*“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.”* Matt. 5:6

...they knew it was more than a craving for a Big Mac. For the blessed in this beatitude, righteousness is something that they can't live without.

## **Prayer**

### **What did Jesus mean when he said “righteousness?”**

When the Scriptures talk about righteousness, it is referring to a concept that has many sides and meanings, much like a precious gem with its many facets. In the Bible, righteousness can describe the mighty acts of God. This was especially true in the Old Testament when God would intervene to save his people. It is supremely true, of course, in the death and resurrection of Christ. Righteousness also refers to the conduct of our life, as it is described in Psalm 1:

Blessed is the man  
 who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,  
 nor stands in the way of sinners,  
 nor sits in the seat of scoffers;  
 but his delight is in the law of the Lord...

Psalm 1:1-2

In the New Testament, righteousness also means that the one who places their trust in Christ has been declared righteous – justified – not on the basis of things that we have done, but rather the righteousness of Christ has been assigned to us because of our faith in his death and resurrection.

...he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified [declared “righteous”] by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Ultimately, however, (and this absolutely essential for us to understand) *righteousness in the Scriptures is not about obeying the rules. It is all about relationship.* That's what the Pharisees in Jesus' day didn't get. They were meticulous about obeying the smallest little detail in the Law. They were proud of what they did and didn't do. But their hearts were far from God. They were pursuing their own righteousness rather than God himself. But biblical righteousness is all about our relationship with God. If we look deep at the righteous man of Psalm 1, we find that the root of his righteousness is his delight in the law that God had given. It isn't the law itself. It was the one who gave the law. Prayerfully read Psalm 119 and you will find yourself caught up in passion, not for a set of rules, but for God.

Relationship is even at the heart of God's mighty acts. God created out of love for his world and he intervenes through his mighty acts for the same reason.

Biblical righteousness – the kind of righteousness that Jesus was speaking of in the beatitude – is found only in a relationship with God. It is the pursuit of God, himself. It was the deepest passion of the psalmist when he cried out:

As a deer pants for flowing streams,  
so pants my soul for you, O God.  
My soul thirsts for God,  
for the living God.

Psalm 42:1-2

### **Satisfied but unsatisfied**

People are pretty much defined by their passions. Think about it. The deepest longings or your heart are what drives your dreams, your emotions, and your actions. Sometimes Christians can have passions that while on the surface may seem to be good, are misplaced. Some religious people are passionately pursuing a particular spiritual experience. Maybe it's a certain kind of worship experience. If they could have that, they think, all would be well with their soul. It's

not that a passion for a certain kind of worship experience is bad, per se. But the truth is, if we are seeking an experience rather than God himself, we are idolaters. Others think if we could only have a certain kind of programming in the church, then they will have arrived spiritually. It's not that excellent programming of ministries is bad, per se. We need some significant overhauls and improvements. But if that is the focus of our spiritual passion, it is misplaced. That, too, is idolatry.

Jesus said, "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.*"

In John's Gospel, after Jesus fed the 5,000, he told the crowd, "...whoever comes to me shall not hunger and whoever believes in me shall never thirst." (John 6:35) Jesus satisfies our souls fully, but once satisfied, we long for more. This is a strange paradox in the life of a Jesus-follower. Call it, "the Lay's potato chip principle." You can't just eat one. Once you truly meet Jesus, you want more and more of him.

Is that not true?

Sixty-five years ago, Pastor A.W. Tozer lamented the sad state of evangelical churches:

How tragic that we in this dark day have had our seeking done for us by our teachers. Everything is made to center upon the initial act of "accepting" Christ (a term, incidentally, which is not found in the Bible) and we are not expected to crave any further revelation of God to our souls.

*The Pursuit of God*, p. 16

Tozer has always been a powerful prophetic voice speaking to the American church. He wrote that in 1949. Things are not much better today. We read this book by this author or that book by another. We're addicted to celebrity Bible teachers and their videos. We cite them as our authority rather than the Spirit of God who longs to speak directly through his word to people who will hunger and thirst for him. Instead, we let our teachers do the seeking for us. Dr. David Jeremiah says this... Warren Wiersbe that... or Charles Stanley another thing. I'm not against

video teaching, books, or any of those men. My shelves are lined with my favorite authors and I am susceptible to the same idolatry that comes from *substituting the word of man for the living word of God*.

In the meantime, Jesus invites us to pursue him.

There have always been people whose spirit burned with a passion to know God. They met him and found him, just as he promised. He filled their deepest longings. But that only intensified their longing for him even more. Read the mystics and hymn-writers of long ago who would write,

We taste you, O Living Bread,  
 And long to feast upon you still:  
 We drink of you, the Fountainhead  
 And thirst our souls from you to fill. (St. Bernard of Clairvaux)

The one who hungers and thirst for righteousness always wants to be right with God and in the center of his will. There is no satisfaction in getting what you want if in the getting you sinned against God. It is the passion to be right with God that overrides all passions:

- You may win the argument with your spouse, but if in so doing so were ungodly, your soul is grieved.
- You may reach your objective at work, but if in doing so actions displeased God, your soul is grieved.
- You may have been able to acquire the thing you really wanted, but if in so doing you cheated God in your giving, your soul is grieved.

The one who hungers and thirsts for righteousness finds the greatest joy in the center of God's will. Nothing else will do, even if it means suffering or giving up some personal advantage. The one who hungers and thirsts for God is fully satisfied in him but never satisfied in himself. The Apostle Paul wrote:

Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

Romans 7:21-24

Those who hunger and thirst for God know this great grief over the way they live their lives. More than anything, they want to please God! Such angst is not a sign of failure at all. It's sign that we are spiritually alive and that our hearts still beat for God.

Earlier this week, in our deacon board meeting we were discussing a question of how to deal with a challenging moral issue. One of the deacons began to offer his opinion with these words, "Every day I wake up and I am reminded that I am a broken person..." And the wisdom that he offered resonated with all of us because it was from a heart that was pursuing God.

Our mission is to help people find and follow Jesus. Hungering and thirsting for God is the hallmark of a Jesus-follower. We are in a good place right now in our church. We are in a strategic place that will determine our future effectiveness for the kingdom of God. We have to formulate a united vision together. But we have all kinds of different agendas. Some people want this kind of program or that kind of worship service. Others are fixated on the building. If we could only fix the bathrooms and the nursery, we will have success. And ministry success is what we seem to be all longing for.

Friends, that falls woefully short of what God wants for us. Those are good things and they may come. But it is not God's will for us. Let our unified singular vision be that we hunger and thirst for God and his righteousness. Jesus said it plainly, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matt. 6:33).

### **Prayer**

O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you;  
my soul thirsts for you;  
my flesh faints for you,  
as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary,  
    beholding your power and glory.  
Because your steadfast love is better than life,  
    my lips will praise you.  
So I will bless you as long as I live;  
    in your name I will lift up my hands.  
My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food,  
    and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips,  
when I remember you upon my bed,  
    and meditate on you in the watches of the night;  
for you have been my help,  
    and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy.  
My soul clings to you;  
    your right hand upholds me.

Psalm 63:1-8