



good shepherd
presbyterian church

Hungry for What is Right

Matthew 5:6; 6:31-34; Isaiah 55:1-2

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For the last 12 weeks or so I've been working diligently on exercising and eating well. You're supposed to do these two things in tandem, but one of the interesting dynamics is that exercise can make you MORE hungry! And so to do the math on lowering the number of calories I eat, but also not walking around hungry all the time, I have to be thoughtful about what I eat. I may crave a bowl of ice cream, but you know what? It does not take the hunger away. Usually some good protein or complex carbs is what will do that. Being thirsty is similar. There's nothing that quenches thirst quite like water. A soda sure won't do it; the sugar and caffeine just makes you hungry and thirsty for more!

I share all that because in the verse we will focus on today, Jesus talks about being hungry and thirsty for righteousness. 'Righteousness' is just a fancy word for what God says is right. And Jesus says being hungry and thirsty for THAT is what is blessed. And the blessing is that we will be truly satisfied. So that's what I want to talk about today... what we are hungry for and what it means to be truly satisfied.

I'll remind you of the context. Jesus is teaching his followers (that means it's for us!) on the mountainside, but the crowds that followed him around are not too far away. He is teaching his followers what it is to be blessed and they are supposed to, in turn, go and bless the crowd, their community, the world. So it is with us. Listen today to see how God is blessing you and how you might bless others. That's our goal!

Hungry for What?

Jesus uses imagery of food and water, being hungry and thirsty, more than you might realize. Perhaps that's because both are essential to life, but both can also be mis-used. In several encounters Jesus talks about Living Water and Bread of Life, both in reference to himself and to indicate that there is more to life than where your next meal or drink is going to come from. He tells the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4) that he has what she has been seeking... living water. He tells the crowds following him and looking for another miracle that he has – and IS – bread from heaven greater than the miracle of manna during Moses' time. (John 6)

In the passage we heard today from Matthew 6 he says that people worry and get anxious about where their next meal is coming from, or their clothing. Instead of worrying about tomorrow he says, "Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." (v.31-34) There's that word again: righteousness. So what does it mean to seek it? To hunger and thirst for it?

'Righteousness' means doing what is right, specifically what God requires. So it is tied to obedience. We discover what God requires by reading and studying His Word and doing what it says to do. I cannot help but recall Micah 6:8 again... "He has told you, O people, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God."

But in the same breath I say that, perhaps the biggest distinction to make here is that Jesus says we are to hunger for GOD'S righteousness. Not too much further in Matthew (cf. 6:1) he will warn against pursuing *our own* righteousness: "Beware of practicing your righteousness before others to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven." Jesus seems clear that the point of obeying God is not to make ourselves look good, but to share in God's goodness. And that is the essence of blessing! Blessing is sharing in God's goodness by desiring and following God's Word and will.

Truly Satisfied

And here's the blessing: if you hunger and thirst for God's righteousness, if you seek first what God says is good and right, you will be truly satisfied.

We settle for lesser satisfactions. In fact, some theologians claim that many of the things we might describe as sinful behaviors – lust, gluttony, etc... - are us taking the shortcut, trying to be satisfied. It's me eating the bowl of ice cream when what I need is some protein, vegetables, and fruit.

And here's the truly amazing thing: you'd think that true satisfaction – what we really need – would cost extra. But let me read the call to worship scripture to you again. It's from Isaiah 55:1...

“Come! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy, and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.”

Do you hear that? God offers His righteousness freely to all who will come and receive it! Let me read a bit further...

Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourself in abundance. Incline your ear and come to me. Listen, that you may live... (Isaiah 55:2-3a)

That's just what we do, isn't it? We not only spend money, but our time, attention, and passions on what does not satisfy, when God has what is truly good and truly satisfying. And so God urges us to LISTEN, that we may live!

We'll have some time to reflect, confess, and respond, but I'd challenge you to take some additional time this afternoon or evening and consider where in life you are dis-satisfied. What do you hunger and thirst and yearn for? And how does what God wants fit into your life?

This is not about guilt or shame. This is all invitation! If you are thirsty (and if we are honest, I think we all are!), come to the waters! What would it mean to delight yourself in God's abundance?

Blessing Challenge

That leads me to this week's blessing challenge. I want to remind you what it is and then add an extra bit from a call I got from one of you this week.

The challenge: Before you go to bed tonight, think of one way God has blessed you. Is there a way in which you have experienced the satisfaction and the abundance that comes from seeking what God wants in your life? Or maybe you want to go back to one of the other blessings we've talked about. And then this week, before next Sunday, would you keep your eyes open for one opportunity to bless another person. Perhaps it will be noticing that they are doing what God wants of them and you can tell them you noticed and are encouraged by that.

And that relates to the call I got this week. I've been encouraging you to tell me about the blessing challenge. One person called me this week and said last week's challenge prompted them to reflect on what a blessing living with and near extended family has been in their life. And it prompted them to TELL their family, to thank them, and share that gratefulness. Now that's sharing the blessing!

I hope you will take up this challenge. Jesus describes these blessings so you will know God's blessing and then overflow to others. May God open your eyes and give you opportunity this week. Amen!