

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO ARE HUNGRY AND THIRSTY

Text: Matthew 5:6

John 4:7-15

LHUMC 3/9/14

Beatitudes Series #5

I. Introduction

- A. We've been starting each time together over these weeks with a question. And today's beatitude begs some big questions. The questions begin with—Are you hungry? If so, what are you hungry for? If you're talking the "growling stomach" kind of hunger-- donuts do it for me—I can have just eaten, but when I walk through the bakery at Meijer and see those donuts in that case, I get hungry.
- B. Are you thirsty? I'm a Mountain Dew guy when I need the caffeine, and Squirt when I don't.
- C. Or maybe you hear that question and you take the broader view—the view Jesus tends to take when he starts talking about hunger and thirst. For Jesus, to be hungry or thirsty brought to mind a bigger picture and bigger questions—Questions like "What is it that you desire?" "What is it that you are longing for? What is it that you are **hungering** for? "What is it that if you get it, will "fill" you?" For me, I see that TV ad for the new BMW 2-series and I admit, I get a little hungry!
- D. Or to take it even a step further, in the animal kingdom, it's known that when animals get hungry or thirsty enough, they will be driven to do remarkable things in order to find food and water. And so given that, maybe the even bigger question that today's Beatitude brings about is the question of what drives you? What is it that you most seek when you are feeling empty? Material things? Success? Financial security? Or something deeper?

II. In light of all of these questions and even more so in light of all these possible answers, what exactly is it that Jesus says we should be hungry and thirsty for?

- A. As we keep reading the Beatitude, his answer is that loaded term again, that keeps popping up because it's all over the Bible—he says we are supposed to hunger and thirst for righteousness.
 - 1. And we've talked a lot about how easy it is to mis-define that word, and turn it in to what Jesus says clearly it isn't.
 - 2. Namely to make righteousness all about rules and our ability to follow them.

3. If you take it that way—then today’s Beatitude sounds something like this—“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst to be perfect all the time, and when they think they are, they look down their noses at everyone else, and they will be even more filled with self-perceived perfection than they already are.” I looked at every translation I could find of this Beatitude, and I never found it translated like that.
 4. As I keep saying, “righteousness” as Jesus defines it here and elsewhere is about our relationship with God, our relationship with each other, and God’s relationship with us.
 5. And so given that definition, this Beatitude becomes more about being hungry and thirsty and longing for and even driven for a better, deeper, and more lasting relationship with God.
- B. So as I’ve been pondering this and reading what Eric Kolbell and others have to say about it—what Jesus says we should be hungering and thirsting for, I’ve had some random thoughts and images come to mind.
1. Picture first a Chinese buffet restaurant (maybe that one by Meijers)
 - a) Acres and acres of buffet, with something for everyone.
 - b) And so you stuff yourself, but since it’s Chinese, it doesn’t take long before you’re hungry again.
 - c) As I ponder that image, I realize that there are some similarities to what Jesus is talking about in the Beatitude.
 - 1) If we are spiritually hungry and thirsty for a better relationship with God, the reality is that God has already laid out this magnificent spiritual buffet out there from which we can feed ourselves. This buffet includes things like worship and Bible studies and prayer groups and mission opportunities and on and on and on. Have you ever thought of our church and all that goes on here like a spiritual buffet?
 - 2) And it’s not just a public kind of place, there are also lots of private opportunities that God gives us to be fed and watered—prayer and devotion and meditation, etc.
 - 3) And another truth is that even after feeding on all of these things from God’s buffet, hopefully we are always still hungry.
 - 4) Show me a Christian who thinks that he or she is ever spiritually stuffed in this life, and I’ll show you someone

who is probably a little self-satisfied and probably very self-righteous.

- 5) So when I asked you a minute ago if you were hungry or thirsty, if you were thinking at a spiritual level, at a righteousness level, the only correct answer would have been “yes”.
 - 6) One thing that is different in this spiritual buffet is that we can’t always pick or choose—we can’t keep coming back to the same dishes that we like so much at the buffet. When I’m at a Chinese buffet, I always skip the sushi, because that’s not my thing.
 - 7) But if we are desiring to truly be fed, at this spiritual buffet that God has laid out for us, we can’t skip the sushi—to be fed is to grow, and to grow is to partake of activities or to minister in places or to people that are out of our comfort zones once in a while.
2. And then beyond that image, I’m also realizing that if we are to be hungry and thirsty for righteousness, it may mean that we have to empty ourselves of some other things to make room for the right stuff.
- a) In my experience, a hunger and thirsting for righteousness happens at those moments in life when we get this little niggling feeling that despite the fact that our lives are full of other kinds of “stuff”, material and spiritual, we are somehow empty.
 - b) There have been times in my life when I might have appeared to be the most full, where if I’m honest, I was at my emptiest.
 - c) And it is at those moments that we have to “empty our spirits” to make room.
 - d) To empty ourselves of the things that have given us the illusion of fullness.
 - e) And it’s not just material things--there is a lot of spiritual junk food out there these days, (or maybe the better term is spiritual “cotton candy”—it tastes sweet going down, but it’s not very good for us, and it’s nutritional value is negligible at best).
 - f) Whether it’s self-help books that urge us to go it alone and step over as many people as we can to get to the top, or books from TV preachers that tell us that if we are faithful enough, we’ll experience great prosperity, there is a lot of cotton candy out there.

- g) Sometimes we just have to empty our souls of stuff like that so God can fill us with His food and water.
 - h) Eric Kolbell describes what the re-arrangement of priorities that comes from this kind of hunger and thirsting might look like: “(You) put yourself in right relationship with God by putting yourself in right relationship with others. And put yourself in right relationship with others by putting yourself second and them first. Allow yourself a little less so that others might have a little more. Travel lighter than you might. Buy one less Christmas gift and give a little money to the poor. Watch one less TV show and give a little more time to your children. Pray for others before you pray for yourself. Cut out a meal this week, or maybe just a snack, and use your savings to pick up a few groceries for the local food pantry. Volunteer some time there. Visit the neighbor whom no one else can stand. Walk to work tomorrow for the sake of the air you breathe, let alone for the exercise.” (p.79)
 - i) You see from that list, it’s not like you have to give it all up and join a monastery or something in order to be hungry and thirsty for righteousness. Sometimes it’s just partaking of the small opportunities that God gives us to be fed.
- C. And then as we look at the second part of the Beatitude about the promise that someday, if we are hungry and thirsty for the right things, we will be filled, there are some other significant truths to be gained from the story we heard about the Samaritan woman at the well, who comes face-to-face not only with Jesus himself, but also with the kind of water he offers to cure her of her thirst for righteousness. This is one of those stories that speaks volumes about both Jesus and the one he encounters on his journey.
1. About the woman at the well—we find out that her life up to that point had been what you might call “less than stellar”, or to use today’s terminology, somewhat “empty”
 - a) In the part after what I read today, we find out that she’s been married five times, and is living with another guy.
 - b) And she’s a Samaritan, which in that culture would have been another sign of perceived emptiness.
 - c) And yet you get the sense from her conversation with Jesus that she’s thirsty for something beyond the water coming out of the well.

- d) You don't spend that amount of time in the hot sun to have that kind of conversation if you aren't looking for something in your life that's been missing.
 - e) Her story reminds us that anyone can be hungry and thirsty for righteousness, and that it is a very dangerous thing to label someone as "beyond hope" or "beyond needing the food and drink that only Jesus can offer."
2. And Jesus, for his part, is showing us some things as well.
- a) Beginning with the fact that God's well of the living water, God's spiritual buffet, is open to everyone.
 - b) As I said, this woman in cultural terms had at least three strikes against her if not more—she's a woman, she's a Samaritan, and she's been married five times and counting.
 - c) And yet despite all of those strikes against her, Jesus offers her the living water, the water of a relationship with him, the water of true righteousness.
 - d) You could say that at that point, we understand that Jesus didn't just talk about fulfilling our hunger and thirst, he lived it out.
 - e) And as she goes excitedly back into town to tell the others what she had just experienced, we see that she has been blessed. At that moment, we realize that we have just witnessed in this story a "beatitude come true".
 - f) So here's the deal—apparently even at those times when we are the most empty, even when it's our own fault, even when we are the most hungry and thirsty for a deeper relationship with someone, the buffet is always open. Jesus is always there offering us a drink of the living water. All we have to do is accept that gift, and we are blessed, we are filled.

III. Conclusion

- A. The Message translates this Beatitude like this: "You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God. He's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat."
- 1. Given that translation, I would ask—What are you doing to work up a good appetite for God? Are you emptying yourself of those things that only seem to be filling, but are just empty calories?
 - 2. Are you realizing that you always have to have a healthy appetite for God and God's call on your life?
 - 3. Are you open to the food and drink that only God can offer—even if it comes from a part of the buffet that you've never partaken from before?

- B. And what about that meal—that promise that when we partake of God’s spiritual buffet, it will be the best meal we’ll ever eat.
- C. Years ago I first saw a movie called “Babette’s Feast.”
1. It’s about two elderly single sisters living in a small village in 19th century Denmark, where their father had been pastor of a very austere and strict Christian group.
 2. At one point in the story, they hire a French woman who comes to town as a political exile to be their cook.
 3. Years later, the cook wins the lottery, and to give back to the sisters and the town, takes the money and uses it to buy and have shipped all of these ingredients from Paris to make a feast that is nothing like the town has ever seen.
 4. What I remember about the feast scene (which takes up the whole last section of the movie) is not just the reaction of the people, as they wonder if they should be enjoying the feast, or to show delight in it might somehow be sinful.
 5. What I really remember is how the atmosphere and lighting of the film slowly moves from being so dark it’s almost black and white, to becoming more and more colorful. (It is cinematography at it’s best)
 6. Every time I see it, I think of the woman at the well, who came there that day living a colorless, black and white kind of life, and how as she runs back into town after having been given that life-giving water, how now her life was in full color.
 7. And I think of us, as we turn away from doing what Isaiah says in the Message when he says “Why do you spend your money on junk food, your hard-earned cash on cotton candy?” (55:2) and we begin to hunger and thirst for righteousness, for a right relationship with God and with each other.
 8. And as we begin to seek out the kind of food and drink that only God can provide, we too begin to have more color and joy and blessing in our lives also.
 9. For the promise is that as we hunger and thirst for that kind of sustenance, we will be filled with an abundance and with blessings that we have not even imagined.
 10. Thanks be to God for filling us when we are the hungry and thirsty for the right things.