

“Those Who Hunger & Thirst”

Introduction: What is it that makes you really hungry or really thirsty? Is it a good long walk? Working in the yard or garden? Running the vacuum cleaner or leaf blower? What do you reach in the pantry for, or peer into the refrigerator to find, to satisfy your need? How about your emotional hunger and thirst, what might you turn to there? Would a promotion make you happy? How about a smart watch or new pair of ski boots? Or maybe season tickets to the Patriots games?

When it comes to being happy, to being satisfied, to feeling like you’re flourishing, the world posts a sign like the one that I saw in NH on Rte. 93 awhile back: “Shop, Eat, Live.” It’s what the average mega-mall promises: “Come within, fill your bellies and your bags, and leave feeling satisfied.” But Jesus says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.” When the kingdom of God begins to get into us, Jesus says, our appetites, what satisfies us, begins to change. Do you believe that? Have you experienced that? What is this righteousness Jesus suggests we will crave? How will it satisfy us like nothing else? Let’s hear an explanation from Jesus and a prayer from Paul, and then we’ll give some more thought about the direction of our appetites. [READ]

I. Craving Rightly

A. What is this righteousness Jesus talks about? It’s actually a central theme of his teaching. 5:10 suggests that we may be persecuted as we pursue righteousness. 5:20 declares that our righteousness must exceed the external righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. 6:1 warns that we must not use our righteousness as a way of showing off to others. 6:33 offers that if we seek righteousness, and not worry about what we wear, eat, or drink, everything that we really need will be thrown in.

B. It’s a bit like going to the doctor because you’re in pain. The doctor can treat the pain, but if she doesn’t find and deal with the cause, the pain won’t really go away. In like manner, we can seek happiness and contentment and fulfillment, but we’ll never really find it. Happiness, contentment, and fulfillment, Jesus teaches, come to us indirectly; they come as a product of seeking something else, and that something else is righteousness.

C. So what is righteousness? Righteousness at its core is a relational term. It signifies being in right relationship, both with God, and also with the world around us. Righteousness is a reminder that the fundamental nature of reality, as we understand it as Christians, is relationship. That’s because all things have been brought into existence by a God who exists in relationship as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As people created in his image, we are fundamentally relational as well.

D. Not surprising, then, is that the opening chapters of God’s word reveal this basic fact. We were created, we learn, to be in relationship with God, created to delight in him as he delights in us, to follow him as he directs us, and to participate in his creative activity. And, we were created to be in relationship with the world around us, living in community, loving our neighbor, and taking proper care of the earth God has given to sustain us. Righteousness, therefore, does not consist of following a list of rules and regulations but in the faithful living of the various relationships in our lives. The pursuit of that, Jesus promises, will lead to flourishing.

E. Sadly, with the entrance of sin into the world, our wires got crossed and those relationships became shorted out. Our intimacy with God was replaced with fear, guilt, and shame. Our relationship with the world became dominated by self-interest, greed, and abuse. Our cravings for food, for intimacy, and for success, none of them bad when rightly ordered, have become compulsive, obsessive, and even addictive. Economic systems have become oppressive. Political systems have become unjust. Social systems have become discriminatory.

F. Fortunately, by his grace, God has broken into our world in the person of his Son who has come to re-order our appetites, to redirect our hunger and our thirst, to lead us in paths of righteousness. "Taste and see that the LORD is good," the psalmist invites us (Ps. 34:8). Building on this theme of tasting and satisfaction, Peter writes (1 Pet. 2:1-3):

Therefore, [since you are now in a relationship with Jesus] rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind [for these are relationship killers!]. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Taste the goodness of God, is the invitation. And, as a new hunger and thirst begins to emerge, we will find that righteousness becomes not just something we want to snack on from time to time, but something we crave more and more.

Illustration: Think about hunger for a moment. Some of you, right about now, might be feeling a little hungry. Perhaps you got up late, didn't have time for breakfast, your stomachs have begun to growl, and you're looking forward to those fellowship hour donuts and coffee. But let's assume that the deacons all had somewhere else they needed to be and so there's nothing downstairs for fellowship hour. So, you head home. But when you get there you discover your cupboards are bare and your fridge is empty. So, you head to the store, but soon you discover that the grocery stores as well as the restaurants are all closed because they've all decided to observe the sabbath! It appears you will not find something to eat until the next day and you are feeling really desperate, as well as really hungry and thirsty.

That begins to get at the intensity of which Jesus speaks. That's the desperation for right relationships, with God, and with the world around us, that surfaces as the kingdom of God gets into us. The question is, do we hunger and thirst, do we long, do we crave, to have these relationships healed? If not, what might we be craving instead?

I remember a fellow from a few years ago by the name of Butch Henry. He was trying to earn a job with the Red Sox but one day simply walked away from an annual salary of \$1.5 million. He did so because his wife had called and informed Butch that as far as he was concerned, their marriage was over. The life of a professional athlete can be hard on a marriage. Men can forsake their families for the brotherhood of the team while at home, and for the company of strangers while on the road. After his wife called, the team gave Henry two weeks to work things out. When it became apparent that it would take more time (it took a year of 2x week counseling), Henry walked away from a lifestyle many would die for. He said, "If I don't play the game tomorrow, it will still go on without me. The more important thing is that I have someone to go home to afterward." Henry had a hunger and thirst for a right relationship with his wife, above his appetite for fame and fortune.

## II. Getting Satisfaction

A. I can't help but think about the hit song, "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction," written by the Rolling Stones in 1965. The magazine *Rolling Stone* considered it to be the second greatest song of all time. The lyrics reveal a search for meaning in what the world has to offer, but, as the chorus declares, satisfaction remains elusive, no matter how hard we might try, try, try, try. The lyrics tap into something deep within us, and that is that we were wired for satisfaction by God, but we continue to look elsewhere. The prophet Jeremiah records God's identification of our problem: "[My people] have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, cisterns that cannot hold water" (Jer. 2:13).

B. Or, as we heard Jesus put it, "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you." And then Jesus identifies himself with this enduring food: "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty" (Jn. 6:27, 35). Jesus promises to lead us to what will truly satisfy as we follow and listen to him, as we hunger and thirst for the right relationships he makes possible through the healing and harmony of the cross.

C. How long will we hunger and thirst? Like each of these blessings, there is a present and future component. The future component of being filled, when Jesus returns and ushers in the fullness of God's new creation, is described by Peter like this: ". . . we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells" (2 Pet. 3:13). Righteousness will be present, in our midst, all of the time, so that the vision of Revelation is able to observe about the inhabitants of God's new creation: "Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst" (Rev. 7:16). We will be fully satisfied.

In the meantime, the prayer we heard Paul pray for the church helps us live and "taste" the filling of righteousness as we wait:

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God" (Phil. 1:9-11).

May the fruit of righteousness, the fruit of relationships with God and the world restored—of marriages healed, of slum kids in Kenya getting their high school diplomas, of women who have been trafficked entering back into society, of a new generation of college graduates coming to know Jesus—may those "tastes" fill us in increasing measure, satisfying us like nothing else can until God's new creation comes in which we will hunger and thirst no more.