

Life Group Lesson

May 2nd, 2010

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after Righteousness for they shall be filled.”

-Matthew 5:6

It is not at all uncommon these days to hear of an ambitious person as being "hungry" to accomplish significant things. Writers apply this term to athletes who want to make it to the professional leagues, to actors who want to attain stardom, and to businesspersons who seek to become CEO or president of a major corporation. These people drive themselves to work harder than their competition. They push themselves in studying every facet of their discipline, and they practice longer and harder than others. Their ambition knows no limits. They seem to play every angle to bring themselves to the attention of their superiors. They seize every opportunity to "sell" themselves to those who might be useful in promoting them.

Some but not all of these nuances are present in Jesus' use of "hunger" and "thirst" in Matthew 5:6. He describes a person who from the very depths of his innermost being has a driving need to satisfy a desire. William Barclay, in his *Daily Study Bible* commentary on Matthew, provides a colorful description:

Words do not exist in isolation; they exist against a background of experience and thought; and the meaning of any word is conditioned by the background of the person who speaks it. That is particularly true of this beatitude. It would convey to those who heard it for the first time an impression quite different from the impression which it conveys to us.

The fact is that very few of us in modern conditions of life know what it is to be really hungry or really thirsty. In the ancient world it was very different. A working man's wage was the equivalent of three pence a day, and, even making every allowance for the difference in the purchasing power of money, no man ever got fat on that wage. A working man in Palestine ate meat only once a week, and in Palestine the working man and the day laborer were never very far from the border-line of real hunger and actual starvation.

It was still more so in the case of thirst. It was not possible for the vast majority of people to turn a tap and find the clear, cold water pouring into their house. A man might be on a journey, and in the midst of it the hot wind which brought the sand-storm might begin to blow. There was nothing for him to do but to wrap his head in his burnoose and turn his back to the wind, and wait, while the swirling sand filled his nostrils and his throat until he was likely to suffocate, and until he was parched with an imperious thirst. In the conditions of modern western life there is no parallel at all to that. (vol. 1, p. 99)

We see, then, that Jesus is not using "hunger" or "thirst" as we would describe the emptiness or dryness we feel between meals, but a hunger or thirst that seemingly can never be satisfied. With physical appetite, this would be a hunger and thirst that, even after a full meal with plenty of drink, we would still feel as though we could eat and drink much more! Again, as Barclay describes it, **"It is the hunger of the man who is starving for food, and the thirst of the man who will die unless he drinks" (pp. 99-100).**

Nothing can better express the kind of desire we should have to obtain righteousness. The Bible's writers frequently employ the imagery of hunger and especially thirst to illustrate an ardent desire, particularly for the things of God:

Psalm 42:1-2: As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?

Psalm 63:1: O God, You are my God; early will I seek You; my soul thirsts for You; my flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water.

Even if we said hunger and thirsting was just a normal, daily need for nourishment, this still illustrates a continuous cycle of consuming a most vital necessity for spiritual life and strength.

What is the meaning of hunger and thirst?

'Hunger and thirst' are strong words, meaning an ardent, eager, famishing, all consuming craving, desire and passion of the soul for God and his righteousness.

Psalms often portrays picture of man craving and desiring more of God.

Psalm 84: 1-2: "How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord Almighty, my soul yearns, even faints for the courts of the Lord."

Psalm 143:6: "My Soul thirsts for you like a parched land."

What is the meaning of 'Righteousness'?

The word 'righteousness' comes from Greek word "*dikaiosyne*", meaning rightness, quality of rightness or justice. It is justice held in love, both within the man and in the world. It is the rightness judged by the standard of God's law. It means being right with God

What are the things, people hunger and thirst for?

People hunger and thirst for power, fame, money, beauty, sex, etc. There are, however, those who long for God. These are the people who are not just interested or satisfied by worldly things or pleasures. They are the 'Seekers'. It is often human tendency to neglect the spiritual needs. But these are the people who yearn after God.

What does it mean to ‘hunger and thirst for righteousness’?

It is not seeking self-righteousness, but it is the righteousness that comes from God. It is to depend, not on our own will-power to achieve it but upon God. In Jesus’ time, if there were anybody who would qualify for such earnest passion and zeal for God, that would be the Pharisees and the Scribes (Teachers of the Law). But in the same chapter (Matthew 5:20) Jesus makes a startling statement. *“For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law, You will certainly not enter the Kingdom of Heaven.”* How can one attain a righteousness, which even Pharisees failed to achieve? What kind of righteousness Jesus is talking about?

Romans 3:21-22 answers the question. *“But now righteousness of God apart from the Law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who will believe.”* So then, righteousness of God is available through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe in Him. And those who will seek Him will find Him and will be filled. Jesus himself claimed to be the one who will quench the thirst. John 7:37: *“If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.”*

Practical Applications:

Hunger and thirst are not one time need, they are our daily needs. Our body needs constant nourishment from food and water to function properly. In the same way, our spirit needs daily food too. Many Christians suffer from ‘spiritual malnourishment’ due to lack of hunger and thirst or lack of feeding to their spiritual needs. Only God can quench our thirst and satisfy our hunger for righteousness.

Questions:

- What do you desire most?
- Do you long for more of God in your life?
- Have you lost that hunger and thirst you used to have?
- Have you really ever hungered and thirsted for the Lord? (compare it to hungering and thirsting pains for food and water)
- Do you feed off of the things of the Lord or snack every once in a while?
- Is the Lord your sustenance and nourishment?
- Is your hunger and thirst for the Lord ever satisfied? Or, do you have a continuous desire even after spending time with Him?