



# The Trinity Pulpit



## The Only Thing that will Satisfy

**Matthew 5:6**

Dr. Jeff Roberts

October 4, 2009

Jesus said “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.” How hungry have you ever been in your life? For most of us it was the time we had to go a day or so without food. Maybe it was a time when we had to fast before a procedure and we were ready to eat by the time the surgery was over. Maybe it was a time we were traveling and had to wait a while before we were able to stop and eat. Some of us may have really known hunger to the point that we missed meals and were suffering true hunger pains, but most of us have never really known hunger – not the type of hunger that the large majority of this world knows each and every day.

How thirsty have you ever been? Maybe it was at the end of a sporting event in which you participated, you were getting dehydrated, and you longed for something to drink. Most of us have never really ever experienced thirst where we were worried about our bodies shutting down because we were thirsting.

Yet, when Jesus used this term to describe one who desires of God, he used terms that were all too familiar with those who heard his words. The hunger and thirst that is described by Jesus are experiences that those who first heard Jesus’ words would have related to. They had experienced hunger, in some cases everyday. It was not odd for many in Jesus’ day to eat only once a day; they would have meat maybe once a week if they were lucky. They did have water, but it did not come easy; they had to get it from a well; they had to search for it. So, eating and drinking took great effort everyday; they knew the feeling of hunger and thirst.

The words used by Jesus suggest someone who is so hungry or so thirsty that everything else becomes secondary. It is the picture of a man

or woman who is looking for food, not because they would like to eat, but because if they don’t eat they will not be able to function. It is the picture of a man who is thirsting to the point that if he does not find water soon he will surely perish. Everything else in life becomes secondary to the priority of finding food or water; they hunger and thirst with the hope of being filled.

Jesus says that the person who hungers and thirsts for God, which is for righteousness or right standing with God, will be filled. The picture is of the one who desires God above all other things; all else in our lives pale in comparison to knowing and experiencing God. We hunger and we thirst for God.

Jesus reminds us first of all that what we desire is important. You and I know that there are many things that we desire in life. There are the things of the material world: shelter, food, clothing, and luxuries. We also desire those things that are not material but are important like respect, popularity, fame, and influence. Many of us spend our lives trying our best to gain the world, as Jesus would put it, and yet forfeit our soul.

Jesus says that we must hunger and thirst for righteousness. What is righteousness? It is nothing less than a relationship with God. Righteousness is how we stand before God. It is how God sees us. That is why we are told that we cannot be righteous in our own actions but only through our faith in Jesus Christ can we be righteous. So, to seek righteousness is to seek a right standing with God, which comes through Jesus, and it is to seek to know and experience God in our lives.

There are many of us who have discovered that the other things we desire do not fill us but still leave us empty; sometimes they do not bring life but death. The writer of Ecclesiastes had come to this conclusion: everything under the sun was meaningless. King Solomon, who had power, riches and wisdom, comes to the conclusion that everything he has pursued, whether it was wisdom, wives, riches, work, or power was meaningless. He describes it as “chasing the wind.”

How much of our lives are filled with chasing the wind? We chase after things of this world, and when we finally catch them, their meaning disappears like the wind that is here in this moment and gone the next. We hunger and thirst for things of this world, but they are like chasing the wind. They do not fill us; they leave us empty.

There is a story about a crew of a ship that had to abandon it for a lifeboat because of a fire at sea. The crew remained in the boat for several days and the water they had brought with them finally ran out. They looked around and all they can see was water, but it was saltwater and undrinkable. How ironic to be thirsting for water and be surrounded by it, yet unable to cannot drink it. Finally, one night one of the crew members could not stand it any longer – he drank the saltwater. While saltwater is water, it shuts down the body. Therefore, he was dead by morning. How we are fooled by things around us. They appear good and to be what we need, but in our hearts we know the things of this world will ultimately not bring us life; they will bring us death and they will not fill us but leave us empty. Jesus reminds us that we must hunger and thirst, but we must hunger and thirst for the right thing: righteousness.

When we hunger and thirst for righteousness, we must hunger and thirst for all of God. It is interesting that the words used for *hungering* and *thirsting* here by Jesus have a meaning that means “all of it.” In the Greek language there were certain cases of words that suggested that one could hunger or thirst for something, but literally it meant “for some of it.” In other words if you hungered for bread, you really were hungry for a bite or piece of bread. If you thirsted for water, you were thirsty for a drink of water and not the whole well. But Jesus uses a phrase here that is odd and unique in this way. Je-

sus is saying “If you hunger and thirst for righteousness, you hunger and thirst for it all. A little bit will not do. You must have it all.”

I have thought about this statement from Jesus and concluded that what is wrong with some of us is that we settle for a little bit of Jesus. We have an experience with God when we are young and we expect it to last us a lifetime. We have enough Christianity to know right from wrong, make us respectable, but not enough to change our hearts and lives. Jesus says “that which fills is not just a little bit but it is the desire for God that is complete and full.”

Many sensitive Christians are puzzled by periodic dry spells in their religious experience. They ask, “Why are there times in my life when I no longer feel the closeness of God? I feel empty, squeezed dry of the sweet joy I once had. What has happened to my religious experience?”

In such times, it helps to remember that both physical and spiritual appetites are normal to healthy human beings. Neither the body nor the soul is self-sustaining. Both must be fed regularly. Just as physical hunger is a sign of physical health, so spiritual hunger is a sign of spiritual health. The dry periods, when you no longer feel spiritual but continue to live the Christian life out of naked obedience, may be the moments of greatest spiritual strength. In spite of its exhausting demands, *it is better to hunger than not to hunger*. Jesus' teaching is the opposite of Buddhist philosophy which seeks a state of nirvana in which one desires nothing. The solution to hunger is not to kill it, but to fill it. Our desires are not too strong, but too weak. C. S. Lewis said, “We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”

Don't be pleased with less than being filled and satisfied by God. Don't settle for just a little bit of God. Hunger and thirst for all of God.

Here is the good news. Jesus promises us that when we continue to hunger and thirst for God we will be filled. When we choose not to settle for just

a part but want to know God more and more, God will satisfy that longing. Why? It is what God wants as well. God wants to reveal his self to us. God wants us to know him more and more. One of the great promises of this verse is that Jesus promises us that if we will try we will be satisfied.

One of the changes that have come in instructions for parents relating to their children is how to give them praise. Many in my generation have given praise for certain attributes. For example, we might have told our children that they were smart or they were talented. Yet, when they got older they had a false sense of self for they really were not that smart or that talented. They soon found themselves as young adults in situations where they were disappointed and devastated because not everyone else thinks they are smart or talented. Parenting experts are telling us now not to praise attributes as much as actions. I might tell my child “I am proud of the way you study and are seeking to learn”, or I might praise my child for practicing a gift and developing a talent. In this way, I am rewarding their process and their actions; I am praising their trying.

Jesus is not telling us we are blessed for achieving righteousness. Jesus is telling us that we are blessed for trying. When we hunger and thirst we are blessed.

Notice that God does not say “If you achieve righteousness you will be filled.” When I think about this statement, I think about the rich young ruler.

The rich young ruler came to Jesus and asked “What must I do to have eternal life?” Jesus answered “Do not murder, do not steal, do not give false witness, honor your father and mother and love your neighbor as yourself.” “All of these have I kept,” responded the rich young man. Then Jesus said “Go and sell all you have and follow me.” When the young man heard this, he went away sad because he had great wealth.


The rich young man came to Jesus as a seeker, but in the end he went away sad. He went away sad; first, because he was seeking what he could do to be righteous. He thought that he could achieve righteousness, and he was sure he would be rewarded for keeping the commandments. Instead, Jesus called him to follow him, to continue to be a seeker; in particular, a seeker of Jesus. Therefore, he went away sad.

I like the word *sad*, because I think you could say that he went away disappointed, lost, and unsatisfied.

That is what happens when we believe that righteousness is something we can achieve on our own, like a check list we keep. Jesus does not say that we are blessed when we are righteous; first because we cannot be on our own, and secondly because the blessing comes in the journey of following – the hungering and thirsting for Jesus.

My friends, I want to speak to our lostness, emptiness, and dissatisfaction in our lives. We are too many times like our rich young friend. We approach righteousness or a relationship with God as a list we check off and somehow achieve on our own. We come to church, we are good people, we try to do what is right, we parent our children to be good respectable people, and we are not like others who murder, steal, lie, dishonor their parents, and treat others poorly. Yet, we too find ourselves walking away from church, going through life a little sad, disappointed, lost and unsatisfied.

What is the problem? Just like our rich young friend we have failed to see that the blessing does not come in the accomplishment but in the relationship. The blessing comes not from doing it on our own but from living daily with Jesus. When we are in relationship with Jesus, there is the blessing of righteousness and there is satisfaction even when we fail. Why? Because that satisfaction comes from Jesus.



***“Jesus is not telling  
us we are blessed  
for achieving  
righteousness.  
Jesus is telling us  
that we are blessed  
for trying.”***

I know your next question is “Well, then how do I do this? How do I follow Jesus and not try to achieve righteousness on my own?” It begins with our first three beatitudes.

1. We are poor in spirit – We must come to the place where we know in our hearts that we need Jesus.
2. We mourn our sinfulness – We must confess to Jesus that we have sinned and need forgiveness.
3. We must become meek – That is, we begin to live our lives by giving our power to Jesus. What does that mean? Our power is that we can choose everyday if we are going to seek to please God today. It is our choice. We can hunger and thirst for righteousness or we can settle for less. When we give away our power, it is to give away our self to God.

This is what the rich young man failed to do. He was not poor in spirit, did not mourn his sinfulness, and was not meek so he walked away sad, lost, unsatisfied.

Yet, Jesus says “If you will hunger and thirst you will be satisfied.” What is this satisfaction?

This blessing comes immediately, in a process, and eternally. This is the great promise of Jesus.

First, this blessing of righteousness comes immediately. Because righteousness means “to be in right standing with God”, when we thirst and hunger for righteousness – and that is found in Jesus – then we become righteous. As soon as you and I ask Jesus to forgive us, to come into our hearts, and we commit our lives to him, we are righteous. When God looks at us he does not see our failure or our sin, he sees his son. Because of Jesus when we hunger and thirst for righteousness, we are filled in the moment we ask Jesus into our hearts.

This blessing comes in a process. Not only are we righteous immediately through Jesus but once we

have come to Jesus we want to be more like Jesus. So the same Holy Spirit that drew us into relationship with Jesus begins the process of making us like Jesus. If we will allow the Spirit to do its work in our lives, then day to day we will be changed. The spirit will begin the process of convicting us of sin and pointing out in our lives what needs to be changed and how our lives can better reflect Christ. Not that in this life we ever get to perfection but that is what the Spirit is working toward. So, in a very real way this blessedness comes in a process. The more we hunger and thirst the more we are filled.

Finally, it comes in eternity. There will come a day when we leave this world and we go to be with Jesus eternally. In that moment we will be perfected and salvation’s work will be complete. That is why Paul would say of Jesus “He is the author and the perfecter of our faith.” It begins with Jesus and ends with Jesus. We are called to hunger and thirst for Jesus for he is our righteousness. If we will hunger and thirst for Jesus, we will be satisfied.

Have you ever wanted something so bad you would give about all you have and do all you can do to possess it? For some of us it is making a ball team, getting that perfect job, a home in a certain neighborhood, a certain car, or being noticed by a supervisor or our peers for our work. For some it is to achieve some sense of being a “good person.” We try and try, we work and work, and sometimes we even achieve what we have tried to do. Yet, for most of us even those moments of “making it” or “being noticed” quickly fade away. Those moments come and go and then we are left with our self and our lives. We are just never quite satisfied. Like the rich young man, we spend a lot of days lost, sad, and unsatisfied. Like King Solomon we chase the wind, checking off our lists, hoping for something to fill us, but we are never quite filled. Jesus said “If you will hunger and thirst for me, you will be satisfied . . . now, tomorrow and for eternity.”

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.* ❁

