

Matthew 5:6  
Ultimate Satisfaction  
Grace UMC  
August 2, 2009

It's no secret that we live in a culture that has made the pursuit of happiness its chief goal in life. For most people the greatest quest in life is the quest for satisfaction. We live our lives pursuing it. We search for something to satiate the pangs of our human appetites—something to quench the dull ache of our unfulfilled cravings. Human beings are hungry creatures. We look for fulfillment in all kinds of places: money or possessions, strings of relationships or non-stop activity, sex or power, fame or approval. **But the truth is in spite of all our pursuits we're never truly satisfied.**

A very long time ago, Solomon wrote some of the most thought provoking words recorded in the Old Testament. In Ecclesiastes 3:11 he observed: *God has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end* (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

What Solomon observed was that God has created a big, beautiful world with so many wonderful things in it, and yet those things, as fulfilling as they may seem, do not ultimately satisfy the deep hunger in our heart. And Solomon could speak from experience! Solomon had so much, but there was a restlessness and a longing deep within his soul that all of those pleasures incredibly couldn't satisfy. He concluded that the problem stems from the fact that God has planted eternity in the human heart. In other words, **the deep hunger and thirst within us is spiritual in nature, not material.** Consequently, no matter how much we acquire, it's never enough. No matter where we're standing in life, it always seems like the grass is greener somewhere else. Strangely, we can amass our fortunes, we can accumulate our stuff, we can take exotic vacations, we can purchase expensive toys, we can take up new avocations, we can move from career to career, we can bounce from relationship to relationship, and yet we're never satisfied! Our longing for fulfillment remains.

The early church father, St. Augustine, said so poignantly: "Thou hast made us for Thyself, O God. And our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee."

Jesus says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." **What Jesus promises is ultimate satisfaction** – for those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. **First we need to hunger and thirst, then we will be filled.** Friends, there is a common thread in the first three Beatitudes. **Have you noticed that all three of these beatitudes are descriptions of emptiness?** Jesus says blessed are those who embrace their poverty, their brokenness, and their need for surrender. Jesus teaches us that we must first embrace our emptiness. When we do we will hunger and thirst for righteousness. An **empty** heart, a heart that is poor in spirit; a **broken** heart, a heart that mourns; and a **humble** heart, a heart of meekness lead us to hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Just for a moment let me remind you of what we've learned from the first three Beatitudes. Jesus has taught us that to be poor in spirit means to acknowledge that, without God, we're lost and spiritually impoverished. When Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn," he was talking about mourning over the fact that our sins have separated us from God. Our spiritual brokenness should lead to a godly sorrow that compels us to cry out to God for

mercy. When Jesus said, "Blessed are those who are meek," he was stressing the importance of walking in an attitude of submission and humility before the Lord. These beatitudes invite us to empty ourselves of our false conceptions, our mistaken assumptions, and our self-absorption. When we empty ourselves, we will find ourselves hungering and thirsting for righteousness. But let me be clear the hunger that Jesus is describing is an incredibly deep hunger. It's like the hunger he experienced after forty days in the wilderness being tempted by the devil.

The story is told about a young man who approached the Buddha while he was at a river's edge and asked him what he needed to do to attain enlightenment. Without saying a word, Buddha took the man by the hand, thrust his head under the water, and held it there until just before he was ready to pass out. He then lifted the man out of the water, and said to him, "In those last few moments, what were you thinking about?" I was thinking about air," the man said, gasping for breath "Anything else?" Buddha asked. "No," the man answered, "I was just thinking about air; my life depended on it." "Precisely!" "When you can turn your attention only to the eternal truth, as if your life depended on it," Buddha told him, "you will be on the path to enlightenment."

When our stomachs are empty, truly empty we want to eat something that will satisfy our hunger. So Jesus makes a very natural transition from describing a life that is intentionally empty, to talking about what it is that fills that life up – righteousness.

Jesus says that if we allow ourselves to hunger and thirst for righteousness, if we don't try to stave off the basic thirst for God with things like fame and fortune, alcohol and drugs, sex and success, but allow our innate hunger and thirst for righteousness to come out, to come to the fore and move us toward God, we will be filled. There won't be a gaping hole in our hearts. There won't be an aching emptiness. We will be filled and fulfilled.

Jesus invites us to turn from ourselves in order to begin living a God-centered life – a righteous life. To hunger and thirst for righteousness means living our lives in close proximity to a God who beckons us towards himself—a God who is eager to provide for us everything that we need; a God who wants us to learn to love him and wants to show us how to live rightly in relationship with others; a God who wants us to live our lives for him.

Hungering and thirsting for righteousness is really desiring to be who God created us to be. We are created in God's image. We were created to be in a free and open relationship with God – like Adam and Eve before the fall. Sin has broken that relationship. We know that we are not right in ourselves. We know that often we fail to meet our own standards, let alone God's standards. We know that even our best efforts, our greatest acts of good are tainted by mixed motives. So deep within us we hunger and thirst to be all together good, to always do right for right's sake. Jesus says that this longing will be fulfilled.

The righteousness we hunger for is first of all a gift before it becomes a practice. Righteousness comes only one way. You can't obtain it by labor; even if you wanted to work for it, you wouldn't be able to expend enough effort. You can't purchase righteousness; even if you wanted to buy it, you wouldn't be able to afford it. The only way to obtain righteousness is to receive it as God's gift in Christ Jesus. That's what the Apostle Paul realized and tells us about in Philippians 3 when he says: "But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own

that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. “

Billy Graham says it this way: “Righteousness is not something that comes from within us, it’s a gift from God. By grace we have become partakers of divine life.” It doesn’t matter what you’ve done in the past, when you come to Christ, his blood covers all of it and his righteousness has been imputed to us and we now stand justified before God.

Righteousness is God’s gift to us in Christ Jesus. When we embrace Jesus, the righteous one of God, as our Savior and Lord, we find ourselves in the embrace of God’s grace, free to draw near, free to enjoy the greatness and amazing grace of God. Righteousness is first of all God’s gift received by faith as we accept Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord and put our whole trust in him.

Because righteousness is God’s gift, there is no room for self-righteousness. The practice of growing in righteousness so that in our attitudes and actions we become more like Christ, is still God’s work in us. It is the result of our hungering and thirsting for God’s righteousness to fill us. Righteousness is never our possession. It is not a standard we can attain by worshiping in the right church, performing the right rituals, wearing the right clothes, being seen with the right people, reading our Bibles and praying each day, giving a tithe of our earnings, controlling our tempers and restraining our passions. **Righteousness is not something we attain, it is a process of becoming who God created and redeemed us to be in Christ Jesus.** It is the result of hungering and thirsting for an ever deepening relationship with God. This is the desire that God delights to fulfill.

Another pastor, John Koessler tells a modern day parable: A businessman decided to throw a party for some of his clients, and because he was doing so well, he spared no expense. He hired the most expensive caterer in Chicago and rented out the McCormick Center. He paid an army of uniformed wait staff to serve his guests from gleaming silver trays. He commissioned an artisan to carve an ice sculpture of a swan and had it floating in a lake of punch. Engraved invitations were sent out in advance, hand delivered by special messengers in plenty of time for everyone to clear their calendars. But somehow, when the hour came for the party to begin, the host found himself alone. Not one guest bothered to come—not even Mayor Daly. After waiting an hour, the host asked his assistant to get the guest list and begin making phone calls.

The first person his assistant called was very apologetic. She said she fully intended to come, but just as she was about to leave for the party, her realtor called to say that the offer she placed on a piece of property had been accepted, and they needed to close the deal. The woman decided it was only prudent to take one last look at the property before signing the papers. She sincerely hoped the host would understand.

The second person the assistant called was also deeply apologetic and a little embarrassed. “I really meant to be there,” he explained, “but yesterday the Toyota dealer called to tell me that my new hybrid had finally arrived. You wouldn’t believe how long the waiting list was for this car. Anyway, the dealer said I could take delivery on the car today, and after waiting six months, I just had to take it out for a test drive. I was having so much fun showing it off to my friends that the party completely slipped my mind. I’m so sorry.”

The next person the assistant phoned didn’t even bother to apologize. In fact, he was quite abrupt on the phone. He said that he and his wife had just come back from their

honeymoon and didn't want to be bothered. It turns out they had just had their first fight as a married couple, were on the verge of making up, and wanted to be alone!

It went on like this until the assistant had called every name on the guest list. Everybody, it seemed, had some kind of excuse. When the assistant went back and reported the disappointing news, the host was understandably angry. What was he supposed to do? The convention center was already booked, and the deposit was non-refundable. The food was already prepared, and the ice swan was starting to melt! Suddenly, the host got a flash of inspiration. He remembered that on his way to the McCormick Center, he had passed a group of homeless people. He called his assistant over. "Go out there and tell them that there is a free meal for them here!" he said. It didn't take long for word to spread on the street, and soon there was quite a crowd filing sheepishly in the door. But even with these newcomers, there was still plenty of food, and most of it was in danger of going to waste. Looking at one of the street people enjoying the hors d'oeuvres, another flash of inspiration came to the businessman. "Call the homeless shelters," he told his assistant. "Tell them to bring all their people down here for dinner."

In the meantime the guest who had purchased the new car happened to drive past the McCormick Center on his way home. Feeling guilty, he decided to show up at the last minute. Because he had been out driving around in his new car all day, he didn't have time to change into his tuxedo. *But*, he thought, *better late than never*. When he first saw the ragged looking crowd seated at the tables, he thought he had come to the wrong place. But then he saw the host standing in the corner and went over to him to make his presence known. Instead of being happy to see his guest, the host was angry. He called for security and had the guest ejected from the party. The host said, "Not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet."

Of course we recognize this as a retelling of Jesus' Wedding Banquet parable which makes the point: Just because the meal is prepared, there is no guarantee the guests will want to eat it. In the parable, God is the host; eternal life is the party; but not everyone who is invited is interested. Those who could be enjoying the feast lack one important thing. The missing prerequisite is the same characteristic described by Jesus in the fourth beatitude in Matthew 5:6: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." Before we can be blessed, Jesus says, we need to be hungry.

So let me end by asking a penetrating question: What does your appetite for the things of God tell you about your spiritual health? Some of you might say, "Great! I'm having sweet fellowship and close communion with God. But maybe some of you would have to admit that your spiritual appetite for the things of God is lousy these days. You haven't prayed in weeks. You can't remember the last time you opened the Bible and feasted on God's Word. You've gotten into the pattern of showing up for worship when it's convenient. You know that something is missing.

Perhaps you are here this morning feeling spiritually empty. You're discontent and frustrated with life. Friend, those feelings are actually hunger pangs.

The deep and abiding satisfaction that our hearts hunger and thirst for cannot be found in the pleasures, or the promises, or the acclaim the world offers. The deep and abiding satisfaction that our hearts yearn for comes only from God, and God promises to give it to those whose passion in life is to know and serve him!

Friends, we were made for God and God alone can satisfy the hungry heart. Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never hunger, and he who believes in me will never thirst. (John 6:35).