The apostle Peter wrote that Jesus died so that “we might die to sin and live to righteousness” (1 Peter 2:24). The apostle Paul wrote that God sent Jesus “in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Rom. 8:4). This desire to live a righteousness life is only possible because Jesus died so that we might be forgiven, freed from sin in order to pursue a holy life.

To all who are in Christ, God gives the Holy Spirit who renews our hearts and creates within us a new and deep desire to live in a way that is pleasing to God. The paradox here is that we hunger and thirst for righteousness because, knowing we are forgiven and accepted before God, we also know how far we are from all that Christ calls us to be. In other words, we are already fully righteous in Christ but we are still hungry for righteousness like Christ.

I like that Jesus uses the word “hungry” to describe our desire for the righteous life. **Hungeris** **a sign of need**. Hunger indicates the absence of food in the body. It is the body’s awareness of its own need. Jesus tells us that the blessed ones are those who *hunger and thirst* for righteousness. The blessing is not for those who think that they are righteous, but for those who know they are not. We are blessed when we realize our need for righteousness and when we feel hungry for righteousness. The blessing is not that our hunger for righteousness will be satisfied; the blessing is the desire itself to be better and more righteous than we are.

**Hunger is a sign of life and spiritual health**. Losing your appetite is a sign of illness, but when your appetite returns it is usually a sign of recovery. In the same way, knowing that you need to grow in Christ, and thirsting to be more like Him, is a sure sign of spiritual health.

**Hunger is a powerful motivator**. A person who is really hungry will do almost anything to get food, because life depends on it. Hunger produces energy and drives decisive action. Think of the difference a hunger for righteousness would make in any home, church, school, or business if instead of asking, “What’s in it for me?” people would begin to ask, “What would honor God, be good for others, and for me?”

Remember, though, that Jesus does not say that we are *righteous* if we hunger and thirst to be *blessed*. He says we are *blessed* if we hunger and thirst to be righteous. Choose the wrong thirsts and we will never be satisfied. If you hunger for money, you will never have enough. If you hunger for fame, you’ll always crave more. If you hunger for power, that desire will destroy you. Jesus tells us that there is only one desire that will be fully satisfied: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst *for righteousness*, for they will be satisfied.”

Another paradox of the fourth beatitude is that Jesus speaks about hungering and being satisfied at the same time. We experience these as alternatives; when we are hungry we are not satisfied, and when we are satisfied, we are no longer hungry. But Jesus speaks of a deep hunger and a profound satisfaction that grow together in the human heart.

So, how do we cultivate a greater hunger and thirst for righteousness? We start by knowing the difference between hunger and appetite. Hunger is natural. Appetite can be cultivated. A hunger for righteousness arises from within and is formed by the Holy Spirit, but appetites can and should be cultivated. When Paul says, “Train yourself for godliness” (1 Tim. 4:7), he clearly communicates that there are some things we can do that will help us move forward in a life that is pleasing to God.

Pastor Colin Smith tells of a colleague who had a major heart attack. Although he made a good recovery, part of that recovery involved a complete change of diet. Before the heart attack he enjoyed hamburgers, fries, pizza, and ice cream; all of which were forbidden after the heart attack. His new diet consisted of items with low fat and low sodium: vegetables, fish, grilled chicken, and rice. At first the change was hard – hamburgers and pizza still smelled good – but over time the man learned to like vegetables and fish and grilled chicken. What’s more, he felt better and had more energy. As this new way of life took hold, the hamburgers, fries, pizza and ice cream held less appeal. His appetites changed.

Here are five strategies to cultivate an appetite that hungers and thirsts for righteousness. **Gain momentum from the first three beatitudes**. Remember the beatitudes are progressive. We can’t start at the fourth beatitude, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, but if we first become poor in spirit, mourn our sins, and submit to God, we will find that a true hunger for righteousness springs from these roots.

**Practice fasting from legitimate pleasures**. Is our appetite for God being diminished by our hunger and thirst for other things? There may be something in our life that is holding us back from becoming who Christ calls us to be. We may be able to keep those legitimate pleasures of life - like sports, travel, or hobbies - in their proper place if we periodically fast from these things. Some of life’s pleasures at the wrong time and in the wrong amount will spoil our appetite for righteousness.

**Be open to the needs of others**. We usually work up a good appetite by getting some good exercise. The same principle holds true when it comes to nourishing our soul. When we extend ourselves in serving others, we will find that our hunger and thirst for righteousness increases.

**Use life’s blessings and troubles as incentives to feed on Christ***.* Puritan Thomas Watson, writing on how to stimulate a spiritual appetite, noted two things that make us ready to eat a hearty meal: exercise and sauce. Sauce makes food more attractive, and God can use the sweet sauce of our blessings and the hot sauce of our troubles to increase our hunger for righteousness. When a blessing comes our way, we can learn to say, “God is God; I want to know God more.” When trouble comes, we can learn to say, “All else may fail, but God is my strength and my salvation.” Whatever happens, use it to strengthen a godly appetite.

**Trust Jesus to get you there***.* Jesus gives us this promise: our hunger and thirst for righteousness *will* be satisfied. When God’s people finally stand before the heavenly throne, they will hunger no more, neither will they thirst anymore (Rev. 7:16). Jesus will help us in our pursuit of the holy life.

Blessed are those who recognize their righteousness in Christ and who hunger and thirst for more righteousness like Christ; they will be satisfied.

Prayer: Lord, may I seek You above all else this day, for “Your love is better than life” (Ps. 63:3). Help me to actively make wise choices today that will satisfy my deep hunger for You. Enable me to persevere in faithfulness through any “dark night of the soul” you may choose for me. Purge my soul of all polluted affections, habits and rebellions. May Your Spirit saturate my spirit, and may your deepest desires, longings and dreams become mine, O lord. Fulfill Your will through my earthly life this day. Amen

Source: Colin S. Smith, *Momentum: Pursuing God’s Blessings Through the Beatitudes*. Moody Publishers: Chicago, IL. 2016.

**Long to Be Righteous**

Sunday, October 8, 2017

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Matthew 5:6

We’ve reached a turning point in our study of the Beatitudes. Thus far, we’ve learned that the blessed person is one who becomes poor in spirit, mourns over their sins, and submits to the will of God. These first three Beatitudes all deal with our need. They humble us and lead us to bow before God with penitent and teachable hearts.

The fourth Beatitude is about the desire that arises from such an open and teachable heart. Out of the blessings found in the first three beatitudes comes the greater blessing of a heart that truly hungers and thirsts for God and for righteousness.

The Bible speaks of righteousness in two distinct ways. First, there is the righteousness that Jesus *gives* us. The apostle Paul writes that Jesus is our righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30), which means the righteousness on which we depend is in him and not in us. Jesus lived the righteous life that we fail to live. He laid down his perfect life as a sacrifice for our sins and now offers his righteousness to all who trust in him. When, by faith, we are united to Jesus, God counts us as righteous because of Jesus. This is called “imputed righteousness” because it is righteousness that belongs to another which is counted as ours.

The apostle Paul speaks of this imputed righteousness when he says that he wants to be found in Christ, “not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith” (Phil. 3:9). Before he met Jesus, Paul thought he lived a righteousness life, but when he encountered Jesus he knew for sure that he was far from righteous, and that his only hope lay in receiving a righteousness that he did not have.

Along with the righteousness that Christ gives us, the Bible also speaks of a righteousness to which Christ *calls* us. This is the kind of righteousness Jesus referred to when he spoke of hungering and thirsting for righteousness.