

**2023 Theme - Focus On What Matters**

**Sermon Series - Focus On The Heart**

**Sermon Title - Are You Craving What You Really Need?**

**Sermon Text - Matthew 5:6**

**Sermon Presenter - Pastor Larry**

## **Introduction**

“O God, my God I need You now, How I need You now.” That needs to be our heart cry, and that sentiment needs to be ever on our minds! “Oh God, my God I need You now, How I need You now!” If we understand our need for God then we'll hunger and thirst for the things of God and that translates into a hunger and thirst for righteousness and holiness. At first glance, being hungry and thirsting for righteousness and holiness may not seem like very satisfying things to be hungry and thirsty for, but I hope to show you today, why these kinds of cravings are the only ones that will bring ultimate fulfillment and satisfaction! Let's pray!

Our focus on the heart beatitude today from Jesus is...

Matthew 5:6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled!

Let's be honest. Most of the time when we think of hunger or if someone asks you what you're hungry for you will immediately think seafood, Mexican, Italian, Chinese, Creole, Pizza, etc. And if someone asks you what you're thirsty for? Depending on the time of day, you might think, coffee, smoothie, softdrink, or just good old healthy water. Hunger and thirst are both a natural part of physical life in this world! People need a certain amount of food and water to survive. Everyone understands that fact of life! However, what people don't always understand or admit is that people also hunger and thirst spiritually, emotionally, and mentally. We could call it "Soul Food" but when we think of "Soul Food" we still think of physical food! But I want us to focus on feeding our spirit! People in this world have a built in spiritual hunger, but they many times deny it or try to fill it with conjured up, made up, or even make-believe spirituality. Others mask their spiritual hunger by filling their lives with other things: pleasure, material things, fame, popularity, power, success, human relationships. Some try to deny their spiritual hunger even exists. Others try to cover it up, mask it, numb it or drown it with substance abuse! But throughout history and in every culture, the spiritual nature of humanity is obvious, and undeniable. People worship because God created us for fellowship with Him and that God shaped hole in our hearts will only be filled by a relationship and fellowship with Him and what does that look like? It looks like worship and praise and prayer and getting to know God through His revealed Word, Holy Scripture. All other relationships will leave us wanting if we aren't first and foremost right in our relationship with God! You see, no human being could ever be God for you! And when you expect them to meet your every need, then talk about unrealistic expectations! No one can measure up to that, so if that's the expectation, there's going to be major problems, now or later, but they're coming. But when we keep Jesus first place in our life, it takes the pressure off the other relationships in our lives and especially with our spouse and helps our relationships

become healthy. And when our relationship with God is front and center in our life, it will impact the way we live our life! This is where the hunger and thirst for righteousness comes in!

But what does that even mean to hunger and thirst for righteousness? Well first of all I need to tell you that Jesus spoke these words to people who understood hunger and thirst in a way most of us may never know. Oh we get hungry and we get thirsty, but the people Jesus was talking to didn't have running water in their homes. They didn't always have access to good, clean drinking water. So these people truly understood thirst. And they also didn't have access to food like we do today. They certainly had the street markets, but many of them depended on growing their own food, catching their own fish, and raising their own livestock. So they didn't have anything close to Walmart Pickup! In fact, theologian Frank Stagg said this about this verse of Scripture...

"It speaks of a craving for righteousness comparable to such physical hunger and thirst as is known only in lands where people die for want of food or water. Blessed are they who yearn for the victory of right over wrong, in their own lives and in the world. These are assured that God's righteousness will prevail."

Frank Stagg, "Matthew," in *Matthew–Mark*, ed. Clifton J. Allen, Broadman Bible Commentary (Broadman Press, 1969), 105.

People who hunger and thirst for righteousness desire for Jesus to be their Lord, because they've experienced the forgiveness, the grace, the mercy, the love, and the compassion of Jesus as their Savior, so they know that as Lord His intentions for them will be pure and that His will for their lives is best, ultimate, filled with purpose, meaning and true satisfaction! Therefore they hunger and thirst for His righteousness and they desire to walk in holiness! In fact we read these words in 1 Peter...

1 Peter 1:14 As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.

1 Peter 1:15 But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do;

1 Peter 1:16 for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

In other words, we should desire to be holy in attitude and action by allowing Jesus to be Lord of our lives which will allow us to be filled with righteous things, right things, things that really matter, things you can be proud of rather than ashamed of. Things that outlast this world. Later in His sermon, Jesus indicates that those who hunger and thirst for wealth, pleasures of this world, and acceptance in this world, will only find temporary comfort from those things and once those are gone their comfort is gone. But people, regardless of their social or economic status, who understand their need for The Lord, will be filled with things the world can't take away! Now this begs the question for those of us who believe deeply that we are saved by grace and not by works: If we are not saved by our own righteousness, why should we hunger and thirst for righteousness? We understand that when we make the decision to follow Christ and accept Him into our lives as our Savior, and believe what He did on the cross was for our salvation, then we

are clothed in the righteousness of Christ! So if we believe this, why does Jesus say that we should still hunger and thirst for righteousness? There are two main reasons we should hunger and thirst for righteousness and holiness, still craving for them even after and especially after we are clothed in the righteousness of Christ. The first reason may seem over simplified, but it's the simple truth!

## **Unrighteousness is Really Bad**

First of all...

### **Our Unrighteousness cost Jesus dearly!**

Paul said this in Romans...

Romans 4:25 He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

Romans 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Romans 5:2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God.

And then down in verse 6 we read...

Romans 5:6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

Romans 5:7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die.

Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!

Romans 5:10 For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

Think about the pain, the shame, and the heartache Jesus had to endure on His journey to the Cross and then the humiliation and extreme suffering Jesus faced once hung on the cross. And all because of my unrighteousness! The words to the old Hymn speak to this point so powerfully...

"And when I think, that God, His Son not sparing;  
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in;  
That on the Cross, my burden gladly bearing,  
He bled and died to take away my sin."

And then we must realize that to continue living in wilful rebellion against the will of God is unconscionable because...

## **Unrighteousness is dishonorable!**

Why would we want to dishonor our Lord by continuing to live in the sin that caused Him to suffer and die on the Old Rugged Cross! When you think of the price Jesus paid for your forgiveness, your salvation, your redemption, it's hard to imagine that we would want to continue living in the very things that cost Jesus His life. Paul put it this way...

Romans 6:1 What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?

Romans 6:2 By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?

Romans 6:3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

Romans 6:4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

Romans 6:5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.

Romans 6:6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—

Romans 6:7 because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

Don't misunderstand Paul here: He is not saying that you will be able to live in sinless perfection in this life, but he is saying that we no longer have to be slaves to sin. We make mistakes, but we don't have to make the same mistakes over and over again! We can overcome known sin and then allow God to help us move on to work on something else that is keeping us from being all that God created us to be and keeping us from being like Christ! And this brings us to another reason unrighteousness is just plain bad...

## **Unrighteousness is destructive!**

It destroys our witness, our fellowship with God and with others, our peace of mind and it leads to death. But wait, don't you believe that once we are saved we don't lose our salvation? Yes! Once Satan loses the battle for your soul to Jesus, Satan has lost that battle forever, so he turns his attention to the battle for your life in this world! He begins to bring the forces of evil against you to destroy your witness, your joy, your purpose, your worship, your fellowship with God. He can't take away your relationship with God, you've been adopted into the family of God, but Satan will do everything within his power to destroy your walk with God. Paul said this...

Romans 6:12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.

Romans 6:13 Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness.

Romans 6:14 For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

Romans 6:15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means!

Romans 6:16 Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?

I've seen far too many people let Jesus save their soul and then allow Satan to have a field day with their life! Young people, please trust me when I tell you what I'm about to tell you...

### **Unrighteousness is deceptive!**

Satan entices us with sin! He makes sin look so appealing, but he doesn't show you the after effects, the consequences, the toll it will enact on your life and your soul!! Sin is pleasurable for a season and then comes the harsh winter of the soul! Dr. JD Gray put it this way in a sermon many years ago..."Sin takes you further than you ever thought you would go, keeps you longer than you ever thought you would have to stay, and makes you pay more than you ever thought you would have to pay!"

Paul said this in his letter to the Galatians...

Galatians 6:7 Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.

Galatians 6:8 Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction...

In the Greek, the word for deceived that Paul used can mean deception from without as well as self-deception. Many times, we are self-deceived and this is the hardest deception to recognize. If a farmer sows corn seeds expecting to harvest beans and then goes to the local seed store to register his complaint that corn came up, not beans, someone would probably call his family and tell them to take him to the hospital. Something's not right! Every farmer knows you reap what you sow. However, people think in the spiritual realm it doesn't matter what you sow.

Longtime New Testament Professor at Southwestern Seminary in Ft. Worth, Dr. Jack MacGorman said this...

"They seem so surprised when having sown rebellion against God, they don't reap a peaceful world; having sown graft, they do not reap stable government; having sown dishonesty, they do not reap integrity in the business community; having sown prejudice, they do not reap goodwill; having sown lust, they do not reap meaningful marriages; having sown escape through alcohol and nicotine, they do not have sons and daughters who shun drugs. This is mocking God, and to mock God is to assure disaster."

But Paul goes on to say this...

Galatians 6:8b ...whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

Galatians 6:9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

Now I need everyone to listen up. Don't miss this truth. Especially if you are a new Christian. The church has done a great disservice down through the years to new Christians by not explaining what I'm about to explain. When you come to Christ and confess your sins and ask for forgiveness, you get forgiveness right then. Forgiveness is instantaneous! Grace and mercy are instantaneous! God's love is instantaneous! You get a new heart, but your mind, your habits, your attitudes will take some time to change. And the circumstances in your life will not change instantaneously! You must know this or you will get very discouraged very quickly. It's the law of the harvest. You've planted some seeds in your life that are not Godly. If you've asked for forgiveness, you've already been forgiven, but remember, we reap what we sow. There is still a harvest coming and some of the fruit is going to be bitter. Here's what happens many times... A person accepts Christ and is forgiven for all the wrongs they have done. The person is on a spiritual high and should be! It's exciting. However, there's still some bad seed in the ground. Some very negative consequences may still be coming and we get so excited celebrating with a new believer that we don't warn them. When the negative consequences of their past unrighteousness begin to bear their fruit, you'll hear things like...

"But I asked for forgiveness. Why is this happening to me now that I've accepted Christ?"

We must do a better job of explaining the law of the harvest, and at the same time letting them know the good news. The good news is that Jesus said,

Matthew 28:20... And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

We must let people know If you had not accepted Christ, you would have still gone through this bad harvest but you would have been on your own. But now you've got Jesus and you've got the family of God to walk with you through this valley. We've been through our own bad harvests in the past and we want to help you get through yours! And then we must help them understand what Paul said in verse 9...

Galatians 6:9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

Don't become weary! Don't give up. It's the law of the harvest. Start putting different seeds in the ground and you'll get a different harvest! If you give up and go back to the old ways, you'll just be putting more bad seed in the ground and you'll have more bad harvest to come. But if you start following the principles of Christ and hunger and thirst for righteousness you'll begin planting a brand new harvest. A harvest of righteousness! And remember...

We don't avoid sin, and embrace righteousness in order to earn our way to God! We are saved by God's mercy and Grace, but we seek to live for Him out of gratitude and because it's just a good thing! In fact our second point is simply this...

## **Righteousness is Really Good!**

Once again Jesus said...

Matthew 5:6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled!

Why should we crave righteousness? Because it's really, really good! In fact the definition of righteousness according to the Webster Dictionary is...

“acting in accord with divine or moral law: free from guilt or sin: morally right or justifiable”

Anybody here who would like to be free from guilt and be made morally right with God? But how can we as sinners ever hope to act in accordance with divine and moral law? How can we as sinners ever hope to be free from the guilt of sin and be morally right or justifiable? Good questions. The Holman Bible Dictionary says that righteousness is...

“The actions and positive results of a sound relationship within a local community or between God and a person or His people.”

Actions and positive results of a sound relationship with God! Do you hunger and thirst and crave for a sound relationship with God? You've heard me say over and over again for 21 plus years, we've got a God shaped void in our hearts and only God will fill that void! Do you crave to be free from the sin that has brought so much pain in your life? Do you hunger and thirst for the things of God that will truly satisfy your soul? If your answer is yes, I want that, then I want to tell you how to accept all that Jesus offers you through His death on the Cross! And if you've accepted His offer and have been forgiven of your sin, but you've found yourself still under the control and destruction of sin's power, I want to tell you how to find freedom from the power of sin! But first...

## **How to have Righteousness for Salvation**

Paul said this in Romans 3:20-24

Romans 3:20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.

Romans 3:21 But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.

Romans 3:22 This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile,

Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Romans 3:24 and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

So the first question is this: Are you willing to believe that Jesus gave His life for you on the Cross, and paid the price for your sin, and shed His blood so you could be cleansed from your sin and clothed in His righteousness! Paul goes on to say this in Romans 9:9-13...

Romans 10:9 If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Romans 10:10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.

Romans 10:11 As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame."

Romans 10:12 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him,

Romans 10:13 for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Man, that's good news! Amen! Peter said this...

1 Peter 2:24 "He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed."

1 Peter 2:25 For "you were like sheep going astray," but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Paul had previously said this in Romans...

Romans 4:5 However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.

How is that possible? Paul told the Corinthians...

2 Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

So let me sum it up for you: Admit, Believe, Commit! Admit you've sinned and are in need of a Savior! Believe that Jesus died on the Cross to be your Savior! Commit your life to Him by calling on His name! God's Word is clear...

Romans 10:13 for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

And some of you might be thinking, "Pastor Larry I've done that! I'm saved, but I still struggle with sin in my life!" I appreciate your honesty! Let's end our message today with this...

### **How to have Righteousness for Living**

First of all...

**Admit you can't do it on your own**

I've spent a lot of time down the years counseling believers who have accepted Jesus as their Savior, but who at some point decided not to walk in the ways of the Spirit and were pulled back into the enticements and entanglements of sin! Jesus didn't just die to set you free from the penalty of sin, He died to set you free from the power of sin! Peter stated this in his second letter...

2 Peter 2:19...for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him.

Do you have a sin in your life that now controls you? Some people think they're free, but they're really a puppet in the hands of their vices. Not a good place to be! Let me put it this way...Even though we're not under the law, and have freedom, there are still things we should avoid! There's only one way to avoid things we need to avoid and that is by walking with The Holy Spirit! The Spirit offers us God's power and wisdom to help us know how to reign in the flesh and live in righteousness! Paul put it this way...

Galatians 5:16 So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.  
Galatians 5:17 For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.  
Galatians 5:18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

John William MacGorman put it this way in the Broadman Commentary...

"Here is a thoroughly evangelical ethic. It is dynamic, spontaneous, and creative. It is not a new legalism, higher than the old. It is living grace expressed in a daily walk!"

The second way to have Righteousness for Living is to...

### **Have the same attitude as Jesus**

God is set apart and different and He wants His followers to be different from the world. He tells us to be Holy as He is Holy. Holiness is not being different in a weird way, or in a "I'm better than you kind of way!" Holiness is seeking to live our lives in a way that reflects Jesus' attitudes and actions: humble, serving, caring, loving, honest, having integrity, etc. When it comes to our salvation and the righteousness that has been applied to our sin account, we know we can't boast about ourselves and our accomplishments, but about what Jesus has accomplished for us and through us. We want so desperately to earn everything we have so we can say, "I did that!" But here's the deal: when you realize that Jesus did for you what you could never do for yourself everything changes, and I mean everything! Your motives in life change. A desire to bring honor and glory to the One who created you, loved you, and gave His life to save you, becomes your greatest goal. You'll begin to crave, hunger and thirst after righteousness! Peter speaks of this concept in his letter and oh how it puzzles the living daylights out of people who have not yet found Christ. Listen...

1 Peter 4:1 Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin.

1 Peter 4:2 As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.

1 Peter 4:3 For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry.

1 Peter 4:4 They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you.

Sometimes it amazes me at how upset we get when lost people act like lost people! Don't get frustrated or angry at them! If you do, you lose your opportunity to help them. Nothing brings more excitement to God than for us to help a person deceived and trapped in the lies of Satan, to find true life, true peace, and true relationship with God! But this takes time, patience and a willingness to invest in building a relationship with the very person who thinks you're crazy and makes fun of you. But that's another sermon! Bottom line, if you want to have righteousness for living...

**Stop Craving what will destroy you and Crave what you really need and you will be filled!**

Again, I want to quote Dr. MacGorman...

"Nothing distinguishes man more than his capacity for worship. As there is a yearning on God's part to reveal Himself to man, so there is a deeply implanted need in him (man) to know and worship God. Under the Spirit's sway this leads to deliverance from the present evil age through faith in Jesus Christ with all of the meaning and solace of true religion."

So here's some very practical instructions if you hunger and thirst for righteousness and want to be filled!

Galatians 5:16 So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

Galatians 5:17 For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.

Galatians 5:18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

Galatians 5:19 The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; Galatians 5:20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions

Galatians 5:21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

And remember, the kingdom of God is where God rules, and God is definitely not ruling in your life if those things are going on. However, if you are allowing Jesus to be Lord of your life by way of His Holy Spirit, Paul says...

Galatians 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

Galatians 5:23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Galatians 5:24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Galatians 5:25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

Let's pray!