

2008-06-14

Matthew 5:6 *Hunger and Thirst*

Jerry Arnold

“Father in Heaven, there is sickness in our congregation. There are financial problems in our congregation. There are people traveling in our congregation. There are people hurting in our congregation, and people who are trying to make decisions. Lord, as the shepherd I pray for Your grace to be over them all. And that You will be helping them. Even, we pray for Jorge as he plans to become a student/missionary in Thailand, and leaves. And there may be others leaving as student missionaries. We know of at least of one of our church members that’s still in Iraq. And Lord we lift that person up to You and ask for Your mercy and grace to be with him. There are so many needs represented in the hearts as we stand Lord, and we ask that You will see to them all. And as we open Your word, we pray for ministry from You. We ask this in Jesus’ name, Amen.” Please be seated.

I remember seeing him when I was younger. When I was a boy growing up, he was kind of a hero to me. I never did see him in person, but I saw him on TV, saw him a lot on TV. And so, I wanted to be like him. There is just something about us as human beings when we see somebody we like we want to be like them. We are just kind of do that. You will see it with children and young people, and also with adults. I wanted to shoot a basketball like him. I wanted to be able to dribble like him. I wanted to be able to pass like him. Some of you know about Pistol Pete. Pete Marvich played for Louisiana State University. Man, that guy could play basketball!

I wanted to be like him. I can still see him running up and down the court with his hair flying behind him, and his long, droopy socks. I don’t know how he did it, if he stretched the elastic out or what, but his socks would droop around his ankles. And he would make some of those fantastic passes, and shots, unbelievable shots! In fact, all my friends wanted to be like Pete Marvich. We all wanted to be Pistol Pete. And we practiced that basketball. We played against each other. I will tell you, the closest I came to being Pistol Pete Marvich was stretching the elastic out of my socks so they would droop. It’s as close as I came.

You know, it was in the sixties and long hair was the thing then. And I wanted my hair to fly around like his did. But I’ll just be honest with you, my hair is tightly woven. And when I grow it out, it’d take a hurricane for it to fly around in the wind. I mean, it just stays right there. And so, I couldn’t even do that. But it’s interesting watching how people would emulate their heroes. When my boys were younger, the hero that they liked in basketball was Michael Jordan. And all around the playgrounds you would see children trying to be like Mike. And there is a picture, a poster of him, a famous poster where he wins a dunk contest. And he is flying towards the rim, way up in the air, he had left the ground. In front of the three flow lane, you know. He is up in the air with his legs a certain way, his mouth wide open and his tongue hanging out.

And on playgrounds all around America, and in gymnasiums, you could see young boys driving to the basket with their mouth wide open and their tongue out. It’s as close to being like Mike as they could get. And now, when I look at the finals that are going on between the Celtics and the Lakers, I don’t really know any of those players. I’ve heard their names before but I can’t tell

you what schools they came from, and things. But one thing I do notice, there is a bunch of tattoos. And I have noticed on playgrounds and in gymnasiums, you look around town, kids have a bunch of tattoos. We like to do or be like our heroes.

Well I know in my life, I can no longer even try to play basketball. And I am certainly not going to run around with my mouth open and my tongue hanging out. And I've got a tattoo long before it was popular, so I don't even need that. But one thing I have learned in fifty three years of life, and that is this. It is awful stressful trying to be someone else. And I'd like to study that with you today.

Please turn in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 5. We are continuing our series of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 5 verse 6, our passage today says: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled." As you know, we try to enter into the experience of the people in the Bible. So we can be there at real time. And when Jesus talked to those people about hungering and thirsting, it would have a different affect upon them than it does us. We live here in America, in the land of plenty. And though we know hunger and though we know thirst, we don't know it like the people in Jesus' day knew it.

Those people lived day by day. They were right on the border between real hunger and actual starvation. There were right on the border. If there was a drought people were dying for want of water. When Jesus talks about hunger and thirst, they could relate to it. It was their life. They were no refrigerators; they hadn't processed food in canning it like we have these days. They didn't have running water. It was a real situation for them. They could relate to it. All of them had been on the verge of starvation before. All of them had been so thirsty that they needed water desperately. They knew and understood what that meant. For us, it is simply a metaphor for a great sense of need. A great sense of need! Not a want, though we would want it. But a need which goes beyond a want. Have to have it! Jesus said, "Blessed is the person who has a tremendous need for righteousness."

Now in studying this passage and others leading up to it, I've discovered, there are a lot of theologians who look at this whole section of Jesus teaching as a social commentary by Christ. Here is how they do it. In Matthew 5 verse 3, they said this: "Blessed are the poor." So Jesus is talking about poor people; verse 4, "Blessed are those who mourn." He is talking about people grieving because of their poverty; verse 5, "Blessed are the meek." I mentioned it last week, in the last week's sermon that the Greek word used for meek has many, many meanings. And one of the meanings is somebody who has been beat down by another or someone who's been beat down by life. And so, theologians look at this, Jesus as saying blessed are the poor. Blessed are those who grieve because of their poverty. Blessed are the oppressed.

And when they come to verse 6, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." The word "righteousness" also has many meanings, one of which is "justice." That's how we come up with the word, "justification" when we talk about righteousness. And so, there are theologians who say this is all about how we should address the social issues of our day. Christians should minister to the poor. Christians' should minister to those who are grieving and

oppressed, and those who are crying out as one cries for food and water. They are crying out for justice. And is probably a true Christian principle that we should be sensitive to people's needs.

However, I don't think that's what Jesus had in His mind in this passage. I believe it is not social issues but spiritual issues that He is addressing. By the way, if it is social issues, why is it that poverty gives you Heaven? If that's true, we ought to not help anybody out of poverty. Are you with me on that? You know, "Blessed are the poor for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." We all ought to become poor then. Well nobody would subscribe to that. But I use it as an argument to demonstrate I don't believe it's social issues Jesus is addressing. It is spiritual issues. Matthew 5 verse 3, the poor there are those who have a poverty of spirit. They recognize they have nothing to offer God for righteousness.

In verse 4 when it talks about grieving, it is people who have experienced Christ as their Savior, and now they have a deep repentance; a sorrow for sin, and a turning away from sin in their lives. And the meek, we talked about it last week; we talked about self control and we used the analogy of anger. But one of the definitions of meek, I alluded to, and I didn't spend a lot of time with is, it was the same Greek word to describe a domesticated animal. So that if you took a stallion from out running wild in the plains, and you were able to **lasso** that stallion, and bring that stallion and put him in a corral. And overtime, you were able to break that stallion. You don't break the spirit, but you redirect the will so that the strength is then controlled by the reigns of another.

And that's kind of a picture of Christianity. Jesus doesn't break our spirit. He doesn't take our strength. What He does is He redirects us so that rather than us just running wild out there on the plain, we go where He wants us to go. We give Him the reigns of our life. That's kind of a picture of what is given there. And we come to chapter 5 verse 6. We come to this word, "righteousness," this "hungering and thirsting for righteousness." Now right now, some of you are perceptive enough to recognize, "I am not sure Pastor Arnold is right in the progression." Because here, in the fourth stage, we have people longing for righteousness – I submit to you they got that in verse 3. When Jesus said, "...theirs is the kingdom of heaven." They got righteousness then.

The question is, well what is this righteousness that is being spoken of here? Is it God's rightness, is it His holiness, is it His sinlessness, is it justice, is it justification, what is it? Is it ethics, is behavior, what is it? Well, let's look at a couple verses. These ideas will be familiar to most of you, but let's look at Isaiah 64 verse 6. If you have not underlined this text in your Bible but you've heard it many times, I'd encourage you to underline it and you'll be able to refer to it in the future. Isaiah 64 verse 6, Isaiah says: "But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags. We all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities like the wind, have taken us away."

Now he is not talking about rebellious people. He is talking about people seeking to serve God. And he says, "Our righteousnesses are like filthy rags." Now, I can remember being a teenager.

My mother was always on to me about my bedroom. My brother and I shared the same bedroom. My brother is very neat. His brother is different than that. And my brother had a line; he drew a line in the middle of the room. This was his side; this was his brother's side. And when Mom came in, my brother Tom, everything was nice, clean, dusted, nice. She would say to me, "Jerry, your side is a mess." Okay, I could deal with the mess. A mess is nothing to me. It's the way I function. A mess, no problem! If she had come in and said, "Jerry, your room is untidy." Okay, I can deal with untidy, no problem. "Got any other issues Mom?"

But, if my Mother ever came in and said, "Jerry, your room is filthy." Ooh, that's got connotations I don't like. I mean, that's in the barn where the horse maneuver hasn't been cleaned up, in my mind. And so, filthy is different than just being untidy. God is not saying that our righteousness is a bit untidy. You know, "you need to redirect some things etc..." You know, it's filthy! Absolutely, deplorably filthy! That's your best compared to Him. And yet, this verse is saying, "Blessed is he that hungers and thirsts for righteousness." Where do we get it, how do we get it, what is it?

Well let's look at Romans 5 verse 17. Paul weighs in on this topic with one verse. He says: "For if by one man's offence death reigned through the one..." he is referring to Adam, "...much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ." So righteousness is mentioned here, grace is mentioned here, the gift of righteousness is mentioned here. Whatever righteousness is it is a gift given to us by God in Jesus Christ. But those of you who are perceptive, I know you are thinking right now. "But Jerry, you just argued against the whole progressive spiritual walk that you have been identifying. Because you keep saying, in Matthew 5 verse 3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven," that they've got righteousness then.

And I agree with you. What is the righteousness that is being spoken of here? Well, I want first of all to walk you through some comments that Jesus makes. Then we will be able to answer the question, "What is the righteousness that we are to be hungering and thirsting after?" Look at John 4 verse 34, Jesus says this: "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work." Hungering and thirsting, Jesus says, His food is to do the will of God. This righteousness is associated somehow with doing the will of God. In John 6 verse 35 Jesus says, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst." Jesus says a hungering and a thirsting are satisfied in Him. If you go to Him, you will be satisfied.

In John 7 verse 37, we read this: "On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me as the Scriptures has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified." He had not risen from the dead yet. Now, here you have Jesus saying, "If you thirst, come to Me," He says. And He'll give us the Holy Spirit, and out of our heart will flow rivers of living water.

“Blessed is he that hungers and thirsts for righteousness for he shall be filled.” Jesus has just described being filled here. We are filled in Him. What is this righteousness that is written about here? Look at Second Corinthians chapter 3 verse 18. It says here, “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” “Blessed and holy is he that hungers and thirsts for transformation, they shall be satisfied.” How does that transformation come? How does that take place? It takes place in Christ by seeking after Christ. It is a longing to be with Jesus and a longing to be like Jesus.

Now, I’ve been married thirty plus year now. And it didn’t take long into marriage before some of my family and friends told me that I was actually saying things and making some gestures, or raising my eyebrows the same way my wife does. Have you noticed that? Husbands and wives, they kind of begin to be like each other. I read a humorous story this week about a Baptist minister declaring that at his wedding, the minister said, “We were one.” And then, he said, he and his wife spent the next ten years trying to decide which one they would be? But over time, a husband and wife become like each other. They begin to think like each other.

In fact, I will tell you, after thirty years of shopping with my wife Karen, I can no longer shop like a man. I used to be able to walk in, first thing I saw, buy it! It was good. Not anymore. Now I walk in and I see something that’s good, even if I am by myself, now I have to see what that is looking like in every store in the mall. It took thirty years, but I am there. We become like our spouse. Now I did some research on it to try to understand why that is? I want you to know, the next study I want to do is, why our pats look like us because that would be a fascinating study as well.

But here is why husbands and wives begin to act like one another. We are attracted to each other obviously, we are married. There is love there. There is a meaningful relationship. We like what each other does in certain areas. And subconsciously we imitate what we see in another person that we like. It’s part of the human experience. It’s like having that hero when you try to be like Pete, or be like Mike, or be like a modern NBA player today. It’s just something we do unconsciously. So that if you are with your spouse and you like the way they answer certain questions, over time, you are going to answer the same way. You will have the same inflection on some words, the same lifted eyebrow when somebody is telling a story. These different things, it just happens unconsciously by spending time with another person.

Now note - those who hunger and thirst after righteousness are longing to be with Christ and to be like Christ. But I want to share with you a difficulty we have in the realm of religion. And that is simply this. I am going to set it up by giving you just a little illustration. If somebody comes up to me and says, “Hey Jerry, who do you want to be like?” Now they are going to anticipate that I am going to say something like, “Oh, I want to be like Mark Finley, or Doug Batchelor or Chuck Swindle or Jeremiah, you know, whatever his name is? All I can think of is Jonson, and I don’t want to be him. Anyway, some of these preachers on the radio, some of these preachers on TV; you would kind of expect that.

But if you come up to me and you know I am a minister but you don't know me well, and you are not a part of the congregation, and you come up to me and you say, "Hey Jerry, who do you want to be like?" And I tell you, "I want to be like God." It sounds awful arrogant, doesn't it? It sounds awful foolish, and yet, I will tell you right now that's what we've made religion to be. I want to be like Jesus. Really? Do you really want to be like Jesus? Well, we say "yes" but we don't work that out practically in our minds. I am telling you right now, it's awful hard trying to be somebody else. Let alone, trying to be God. And yet, that has become religion for us.

Now before we proceed to dialog about that, I need to talk to you about what this righteousness is that we are asking for. It is written in the Greek in such a way that it is a complete righteousness, not a partial righteousness. In fact, all of us are quite comfortable with a partial righteousness where we can be so good, and that's good enough. I'll give you an example. A partial righteousness would be a man; he is sitting in the tavern, chugging down beers, backing them up with shots, telling dirty stories, laughing at jokes and carrying on, smoking away, no apparent interest in serving God whatsoever. Yet, there is an accident. He runs out there. He is just right in the middle of it. He is helping to save people's lives, takes a shirt of his back to help. I mean, he just does everything he can to help preserve a life. That man has a partial righteousness.

Take a church member; oh they are good church member. Nobody could ever pin any immorality on them. Nobody could say they lie, cheat or steal. Nobody could say they have the normal vices that we consider so sinful out in the world. They don't smoke, drink, swear or tell dirty stories. But yet, go to that person with a broken heart and discover that their heart is cold. There is no tear, there is no comfort, there is no encouragement. They have a partial righteousness. And I would dare say brothers and sisters. In the church we all have a partial righteousness. A whole righteousness, how do we get that? I've got news for you brothers and sisters. It takes a life time. It's a long haul from accepting Christ to becoming like Christ.

In fact, the devil doesn't want you to become a Christian. But if you become a Christian, he's got a plan for you. You are going to be a successful Christian. You are going to be a super Christian. You are going to be like Jesus. And he is going to teach you, and work with you and show you how to be like Jesus until everything in your life will be an issue. What do I do? What does God want me to do? What would Jesus do here? Oh, I've got a yellow bend on, but I don't know what to do? Issue, after issue, after issue, it's the only way it can go unless we realize Jesus says, "Come to Me!" Jesus says, "I am the bread. I will satisfy you. I will give you water." And the seeking after righteousness is a seeking after Christ. It is a seeking after knowing Him. It is a seeking after a relationship that is so dynamic and so powerful that in the very context of it we become like Him.

Now there are different pictures given to us of how to walk with God. There is a servant, there is a son, a daughter, a lover, a brother, a bride, a sister, and there is the Lamb. The Lamb! Have you ever thought about the lamb? Catch this -- let's look at what Jesus says in John chapter 10. A lamb, a dumb sheep, that's what we are. Jesus says that. He doesn't use those words. He doesn't say, "You are dumb sheep." But He does say, "Sheep have needs. Chapter 10 verse 14,

He says, "I am the good Shepherd and I know My sheep and am known by My own." Okay? There is one thing a sheep knows, who his shepherd is, right? Now let's look at chapter 10 verses 3 and 4. Jesus says, "To him the doorkeeper opens and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them and the sheep follow him for they know his voice."

We are sheep! What do sheep do? They follow where the shepherd goes. Do they ever become the shepherd? How could that be? How could a sheep become the shepherd? Imitate what the shepherd does? So we got a sheep walking on its hind legs? Well, let's give him a shepherd staff. So we've got the sheep walking on its hind legs with a shepherd's staff. We'll give him a little yellow band that says, "What would the shepherd do?" There he is! Now is that ridiculous or what? I am telling you brothers and sisters, I think we have made the ridiculous common by thinking somehow we can become like God. Now it's true, the Lord improves us. But he improves us by teaching us to follow where He is leading.

And I know what some of you are thinking. "Pastor Jerry, I don't like being called the dumb sheep, I don't like it." Well, all right! I'll go with you. You are a moral being with capacities to think, the capacities to make choices, moral choices. Now that's a whole different thing. Because all the sheep has to do is follow the shepherd, eat what the shepherd says to eat, drink what the shepherd says to drink, just hang around with the shepherd. And when you get hot, he'll even give you a haircut, you know, it's a great gig. But we have to think. We have to reason. So where does it come in? Would you like to see a Biblical description of how a servant relates to God because that's what we want to be? Do we not want to serve God? Absolutely!

I'd like for you to turn in your Bibles to Psalm 143 verses 8-12. And if you haven't underlined these verses, I encourage you to underline them. Highlight them in your Bible. Put stars in the margins, put a box around it, do something. This is a prayer that I am encouraging everyone here to pray this week several times, until it becomes a part of your life. Here it says, now in verse 12, can I get you to forward it to verse 12 in case somebody is just reading of the screen? Here is how I know this is a servant. "In Your mercy cut off my enemies, and destroy all those who afflict my soul. For I am Your servant."

Okay, now you can relax. You know this is a servant's prayer. Let's go back to verse 8. Here is the prayer: "Cause me to hear Your lovingkindness in the morning..." What a prayer, what a prayer! "Lord, I want to hear again that You love me." What a prayer! How much time do we spend trying to figure out what God wants us to do? How are we supposed to keep the Sabbath? How are we supposed to eat? How are we supposed to recreate? How, how... We go crazy trying to figure it all out. And the Lord is saying, "Relax! You are already saved if you have Christ in your heart. Relax! Enjoy the ride, enjoy the journey, walk with Me! Call on Me every day to tell you again how much I love you." He'll do that for us, He is longing to do that. He wants you and I to smile every now and then. He wants you and I to have some joy in our lives. Yes, life it's difficult here, but hey, it's going to be over some day. And we'll have eternity!

We get so wrought up trying to be like Jesus we forget about Jesus. “Cause me to hear Your lovingkindness in the morning for in You do I trust...” “I trust You Lord! Please tell me again that you love me.” “Cause me to know the way in which I should walk, for I will lift up my soul to You.” Now it seems so subtle here. But how many of you have struggled over and over trying to figure out what God wanted you to do? And here the prayer is, “Lord, cause me to know the way You want me to go.” It’s a different emphasis. I am saddened at what we are as humans, how we can take religion and use it to turn us away from God.

You take a group like ours, and within our denomination there are subgroups, and subgroups of the subgroups, and there is this meeting and that meeting, and this conference and that conference. We have people going here and people going there and they are all longing for something. There are all longing for something better, and they want to join a group here, and they want to join a group there. And they are told, “If we can only learn how to pray then God will do something. If we can only learn how to keep the Sabbath or be pure people, God will do something.” Do you realize what we are saying when we say that? We are saying, “If we do xyz, God becomes a debtor. He has to do abc.” God doesn’t need our prayers to act. No, I am sorry, that’s not entirely theologically correct.

Well, no, He doesn’t need our prayers but He covets our prayers because of what it does for us. In another words, if you never say a prayer for your child, there is still a chance God will get to him. But there is a greater chance if you pray. So, I don’t want to bring confusion there. What I want to do is defuse the idea that if we can just offer so many good and right prayers, God will act. Or if we can keep the Sabbath on a certain way, God will act. It doesn’t work that way. All through the Gospels read, God is acting despite people’s lack of prayer or lack of asking, and stuff like that. God is acting. What we need to do is get into a relationship of love with Him where we are enjoying walking with Him. We have some hope and courage and peace in our heart, and let God do His work. The world would end when it’s ready to end.

I am amused at people trying to vote for a president this year based on eschatology. If you bring the Republicans in, my, you’ve got that whole church-state thing. You bring the democrats in, well, they’ll hold it back. I am telling you brothers and sisters, don’t vote that way. Vote if you want to vote, but don’t vote thinking you can control the end times by who is the President of the United States. It doesn’t work that way. God will determine when it’s the end, and God will bring it about. And it won’t matter who is in office or if there even is an office. God will take care of it. “I want to be like God. Oh I’m going to be so religious, God has to act.” These are foolish notions that have become church. And we are forgetting walking with Christ and having any sense of happiness.

“Let me hear Your love in the morning Lord. Cause me to know the way in which I should walk for I lift my soul to You.” “I am just going to keep lifting my soul to You Lord. I trust You’ll tell me what to do.” “Deliver me, O Lord, from my enemies.” I like that one. Those enemies can be people, they can be finances, they can be health, they can be sinful thoughts and desires. God will deliver us from those. God gets all the credit. God does everything! What we’ve got to do is place ourselves with God. We’ve got to seek Him.

“Teach me!” Oh, “In You I take my shelter.” It’s basically saying, “I flee to You.” “Teach me to do Your will for You are my God. Your Spirit is good. Lead me in the land of uprightness. Revive me o Lord for Your name sake.” I’m telling you, we need a revival. We need a revival in our souls. That is the watering that takes place. That is the bread that we can eat.

“For Your righteousness sake, bring my soul out of trouble.” Man, what a prayer! “Revive me and bring my soul out of trouble.” What a prayer! “In your mercy cut of my enemies and destroy all those who afflict my soul, for I am Your servant.” “I am with You God, I am on Your team, I care about You. I want to be the type of person You want me to be, but I am tired of trying to imitate Jesus. I want to be with Jesus.” Let happen what happens.

I never was able to play basketball like Pete Marvich or Michael Jordan or any of the people in NBA now. Yes, I could wear droopy socks, stick my tongue out, and have lots of tattoos, but I’d never be what they are. How could we be so foolish to think, we could actually become like God by trying, by being more careful, by reading the Bible more, by praying more, by making sure I don’t do this and I don’t do that and somehow that’s going to make me like God? That’s the common of the dumb sheep. What the Lord is wanting to share with you today brothers and sisters; You are already saved if you are in Christ. You’ve already got the hope of eternal life.

Now seek an experience with Him. And in that experience you’ll become like Him. Oh, never completely! Thirty years of being married to Karen, it’s pretty clear, she is Karen and I am Jerry. We are different, but yet, we are learning to become one. It’s awful hard, awful hard to try to be someone else. It’s time you’d enjoyed being yourself in Jesus, and letting Him be the source of joy and hope in your life. So today I just have a simple question. Is there anyone here, anyone here who would like to say, “Lord, I want to walk with You. Revive my soul, revive my soul, I want to walk with You.” If you want to say that just stand right where you are at. “Father in Heaven, revive our soul, we pray in Jesus name, Amen.”