

March 4, 2018
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Communion
Community Baptist Church
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BLESSED ARE THE HUNGRY AND THIRSTY Matthew 5:6

What is a Christian? Many people might answer that question by describing a Christian as a person who has chosen to follow the religion of Christ. So what is the religion of Christ? Are we beginning to understand why there is so much misunderstanding or confusion about what constitutes a Christian? This is why we hear terms like “true Christian,” “nominal Christian,” “Sunday morning Christian,” “Occasional Christian,” “Fake Christian,” or “Convenient Christian.” It really gets confusing when, on the broader world scene, wars are fought between Christians and Muslims. Please understand that everyone who is fighting against ISIS is not a true Christian.

So what is a Christian? As the word implies, it is someone who is following Christ and desires to emulate Christ. That is what the suffix “ian” means. In fact, “ian” is defined in the dictionary as “being from, related to or like.” A Christian then is from Christ, related to Christ, and like Christ. That being true, it seems like it ought to be quite easy to identify people who are *Christian*.

Actually, it seems likely that the opening verses of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:3-12) are traits of people who have become followers of Christ and are from Christ in order to be like Christ. The “beatitudes” as they are called are actually a good description of the person who has become born again. Some Bible teachers call the Sermon on the Mount, the Magna Carta of the Church. It is the teaching Christ gave to His people that lays down the characteristics of this spiritual body.

This evening I would like to focus on one of those definitions or characteristics of true Christians. “*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied*” (Matthew 5:6). My plan is to make the study simple by considering the meaning of each

significant word in the statement and then drawing conclusions based on the meaning.

Real Christians are blessed.

What does it mean to be blessed? The word *blessed* (including forms like bless and blessing) is a common word in both the Old Testament and New Testament. The most common Hebrew word translated “bless” is *bawrak* which occurs about 175 times. It means to show good toward or kneel before. The idea behind bless is to give good words or deeds to a person. Then there is another Old Testament word that means to go straight and is sometimes translated “happy” which ought to be the case for anyone who is “going straight.”

In the New Testament there are a couple of Greek words used. The word *eulogeo* that gives us the English eulogy and means about the same as the Hebrew word *bawrak*. The more common Greek word for blessed is *makarios*. This word is also very similar to the Old Testament words in that it can mean happy, fortunate, or privileged. It is a word from ancient Greek that connected possession with happiness. Even in secular Greek this word developed into the “beatitude” form we see in our text.

Based on all this evidence, we come to the conclusion that to be blessed is to be in a favorable condition because of certain possessions or benefits received—such a person should be happy or pleased. Now let’s see how that works in real life as we make application of the principle in this context. Stop to consider how this word is applied just in the context of the beatitudes. In verse three we read, “Blessed are the *poor in spirit*, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Verse four: “Blessed are those who *mourn*, for they shall be comforted.” Verse five: “Blessed are the *meek*, for they shall inherit the earth.” Verse six: “Blessed are those who *hunger and thirst* for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” Verse seven: “Blessed are the *merciful*, for they shall receive mercy.” Verse eight: “Blessed are the *pure in heart*, for they shall see God.” Verse nine: “Blessed are the *peacemakers*, for they shall be called sons of God.” Verse ten: “Blessed are those who are *persecuted* for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” And verse eleven: “Blessed are you when others *revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely* on my account.”

With the exception of about three of these beatitudes (merciful, pure in heart, and peace maker) the rest of them do not jibe with our

common experience of blessing. How can we imagine poor, mourning, hungry, thirsty, persecuted and so on being associated with being privileged, fortunate, and happy? What was Jesus saying? What did He mean?

Going back to the idea that the Sermon on the Mount is the Magna Carta (or Constitution, character of the Church), the opening beatitudes describe the people who have been brought into the Church. In other words, this is what Christianity looks like. The lesson here is that the true Christian is blessed.

Maybe we don't understand what "blessed" looks like. Let's dig a little deeper to discover that blessed people actually look blessed, or appear to be blessed. They begin to take on Christ's character. Consider for example beatitudes number eight through eleven. Blessed people "see" God (v.8). Of course, no one sees the invisible God literally. But members of the Body of Christ see God in Christ and in the Bible. Outsiders don't see it.

And the blessed people are called the "sons of God" (v.9). Why are we called that? Sons flow out of the progenitor who is God Himself. A son will manifest certain characteristics of his father. Furthermore, the blessed people, the fortunate people are persecuted because of righteousness (v.10). Is that not obvious? That is the story of Jesus's life. This trait certainly identifies people with Christ. We are also persecuted and reviled on account of Christ (v.11). Yes, the followers of Christ emulate Christ. We do take on His traits, His character.

Christ's character is quite obvious in a sinful world. It is much like the illustration I used a few weeks ago that Christ was like a burst of golden light in a world of navy blue. He was obvious. So are His people, and we are often accepted as kindly as He was. That is why Jesus warned us, His followers, "*I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world*" (John 16:33). And, "*Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets*" (Luke 6:26).

To admit that the followers of Christ will face a difficult road just like He did is not pessimism but realism. These things must be because Jesus is righteous and the world is not. Likewise, Jesus's followers are becoming righteous and the world is not. We are blessed to be characterized like Christ.

Real Christians hunger and thirst for righteousness.

What is righteousness? Sometimes a good way to describe something is to first consider what it is not. Righteousness is almost always defined in some connection with God or a divine being. To be righteous is to act in accord with a divine or moral law; free from guilt; morally right or justifiable. That definition is broad enough to apply to various human interactions and relationships.

But as the term righteousness is used in this verse, it does not speak of doing or being right according to peers or even your culture, even though that would be considered morally right. Righteousness as it is used here does not refer to keeping laws set by political or governing authorities (though Christians living righteously will do that). Nor is righteousness a matter of maintaining the creed or traditions of a religious organization. It is not knowing and obeying traditions passed down by religious groups, churches, or denominations that might have truly followed Christ in the past. And righteousness is not just adhering to family or local church traditions. Many times and in many ways religious rule-keeping has been misidentified as righteousness.

So what is the righteousness for which blessed people hunger and thirst? Righteousness is the character of God expressed in His laws and actions. Righteousness is adherence to a clear standard. God's righteousness is His unwavering adherence to His justice. In fact, in the Hebrew language righteousness and justice are the same word. God's righteousness is revealed in His decrees and actions as they always conform to His predetermined standard of right. Another way of stating it is that God's righteousness is what is truly good.

It was demonstrated best through Jesus Christ God the Son. The writer to the Hebrew Christians began his letter, *Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high* (Hebrews 1:1-3).

Based on this certainty we do well to ask, "What did Jesus do?" "What did Jesus say?" "How did Jesus respond?" The correct answers to those questions tell us what righteousness looks like. Where do we go

to find the correct answers? Righteousness, the righteousness of God as Jesus displayed it, is discovered in the Bible. Righteousness is not the feeling or opinion the reader gains from the Bible. That is the danger of reading a paraphrase rather than a translation. A paraphrase is what someone thinks the message of the Bible might be. Righteousness is learned from the word that God gave us. Read and study an accurate translation. Words and word meanings change. A good translation will translate word for word as much as possible.

Along that line of reasoning we must see how important it is to interpret the Bible accurately and honestly using particular rules for interpretation. To find the righteousness of the Bible, we must interpret the Bible literally. That means we interpret the Bible literally whenever it is at all possible according to the particular text. Second, we must interpret the Bible historically. That is, interpret the Bible in light of historic setting. Third, we interpret the Bible contextually. That means we interpret any Bible passage within its context. Fourth, we interpret the Bible syntactically. That is, we interpret the Bible according to honest rules of syntax, rules that determine how words in the sentence relate to each other. Fifth, we interpret the Bible grammatically, that is according to accurate rules of grammar. Finally, we must interpret the Bible according to genre. This requires us to take into consideration the kind of writing it is such as law or history or wisdom literature and such.

If that sounds like deep, unnecessary theology it is not. If we do not have an accurate translation and accurate interpretation of the Bible, we cannot be sure we are pursuing righteousness. The simple need once we have an accurate translation is for us to read the Bible regularly and continually. Study the Bible. Read books about the Bible.

And many professing Christians are prone to ask at this point, “Why would a typical American spend time doing that?” A typical American wouldn’t. In fact, it seems too common that even Christians don’t do that. Why not? We don’t have enough time as it is. A sincere and sincerely busy Christian might honestly wonder where he or she can find time to read the Bible every day, much less study it and read books about it. In answer to that dilemma, I remember an old saying that goes like this: “We can find time to do what we want to do.” So the question might often be, “Which would you rather do?” Specially, which would you rather do in these situations?

1. Read and study the Bible or find out what your friends ate for dinner?
2. Read and study the Bible or watch what sinful, arrogant people do on television?
3. Read and study the Bible or go shopping?
4. Read and study the Bible or take the kids to ballet lessons, baseball practice, computer classes, art class, etc.?
5. Read and study the Bible or go to the gym?

That is not to conclude that we can only do one or the other. It is not to say that it is impossible to read and study the Bible as well as participate in other activities. But when we are forced to make a choice between reading and studying the Bible and doing anything else, which one generally wins? Why? THAT IS THE BIG QUESTION.

We can answer that big question by answering this question: “What is hunger and thirst?” Again let’s spend a minute thinking about what hunger and thirst, as the words are used in this case, are not. It is not a passing fancy. It is not a popular trend. It is not a matter of convenience. It is not a sporadic need that only arises along with a crisis. It is not a forced need in that no one can demand someone to be hungry. Now, if someone told us they get hungry for something to eat only if eating is popular, or when it is convenient, or only when they are in a crisis, or only when the doctor tells them they must eat, we would rightly assume there is something terribly wrong with them. Hunger for food and thirst for water is a natural desire of living.

So what is hunger and thirst for righteousness? Again, hunger and thirst is a natural signal that our body needs nourishment or hydration. We seldom get to that point in normal life. We eat because it is time for breakfast or lunch or dinner. We eat because we like the taste of the food. We drink because the liquid is refreshing. That is generally the case. However, sometimes we sense true hunger and thirsting. Mow the lawn on a hot summer day and you will experience genuine thirst. Go on a diet and your body will remind you that it likes for you to eat.

That brings us back to the pressing question. “What is hunger and thirst for righteousness?” We don’t read the Bible because someone told us we have to. We read the Bible because we have an appetite to know what righteousness, goodness, God’s justice is. We search God’s Word because we are hungry to know God.

Because we are motivated within our souls to know God and His righteousness, spiritually hungry and thirsty people act hungry and

thirsty. That means that we have a true desire to know righteousness. It is not just a desire or feeling manufactured by emotional preaching or singing. It is not a strong desire for mere religion or for a popular movement. We have a desire to know what God is like and what His will is for us, that is really hard to explain to people who do not have that desire.

To hunger and thirst for righteousness means that we have a hunger and thirst that craves satisfaction. We sit down and open the Bible with anticipation. We should be like a connoisseur who finds fast food to be very unsatisfactory. “Getting in my five minutes of listening to the Bible” should be that unsatisfactory to the seeker of righteousness. Rather, we find ourselves characterized by a strong desire to know God through the Bible even when that desire may not be known or understood by others. This hungering and thirsting for God may be very private. But at the same time, our close associates and families will be aware that we spend time with the Bible, love the Bible, and believe that the Bible has answers.

Real Christians are satisfied.

What is satisfaction? By definition to be satisfied is to be filled up, full, to eat one’s fill. It is interesting that this particular Greek word is always used in the New Testament in connection with food whether speaking of animals or people. In the context of the hungry and thirsty person seeking righteousness, it speaks of a sense of being satisfied, filled up for now, from feeding on God’s righteousness found in His Word.

By experience we learn that satisfaction when we come to the Bible hungry to know God. We read, we study, and God never disappoints. And as we do with food and water, we come back to the Bible daily and are once again satisfied. We might conclude that the satisfied experience satisfaction. What does that mean? It reminds me of the response, “I’m good.”

When I was growing up I learned that if the host asked you if you wanted more tea, the proper response was, “No thank you, I’m fine.” Or if someone asked how you are doing, a typical response would be, “I’m fine” or “I’m doing well, thank you.” But several years ago, I heard a different response to such common questions. Pat’s mom asked one of Pat’s nieces if she wanted more potatoes, to which the niece replied,

“No, I’m good.” I was a bit surprised. The response sounded kind of arrogant or conceited to me. I was reared to believe it was up to someone else to determine if I was actually good. But now we all say it.

That is a very accurate way to describe the result of our hunger and thirst for God’s righteousness. Not only am I “good” in that I am satisfied, but the more I am exposed to God’s righteousness, the “gooder” I am becoming.

The people who seek after righteousness are satisfied with righteousness. When we are satisfied with God’s righteousness, the cheap substitutes of sin and the world are not only unsatisfying, but disgusting to us. We are able to identify this character trait of God and gladly embrace it. We know very well when we or people in our environment stray from righteousness. We feel most comfortable situated in righteousness.

But what if you don’t have a genuine hunger and thirst for righteousness? What if your opinion of the Bible is “Take it or leave it”? What if you can go for weeks without reading the Bible and even miss the preaching services and it doesn’t bother you? There are two possible answers to these questions. First, a person who is not born again, not rightly related to God, and, therefore, not indwelt by the Holy Spirit, has no hunger or thirst for righteousness. Second, a person can be born again but grieve the Spirit of God by avoiding exposure to the righteousness found in God’s Word. But this will be the case for only a certain period of time. The loving Heavenly Father will chasten His child, discipline us to bring us back to the supper table to eat and drink.

If the Bible has no particular attraction to you, if you seldom read it and it doesn’t bother you, you need to do some serious soul searching. When you learn to feed your hunger and quench your thirst for righteousness through fellowship with the Bible, it becomes such a good habit that to miss one day will bother you as much as missing meals and water for a day.