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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“THOSE WHO HUNGER & THIRST”

Matthew 5:6

☑ “**Everybody’s got a hungry heart.**” So sings Bruce Springsteen, and he is right.

We need food to fill the stomach. But is it enough?
We need drink to quench bodily thirst. But is it enough?

☑ It is true that “**An empty belly hears no one.**” A person whose body is starving has little energy for matters of the mind or spirit. But meet that person’s survival-level needs for food, water, clothing and shelter and they will soon want more. A full belly is not enough, not for long.

“**Everybody’s got a hungry heart.**” And, contrary to much philosophical and religious dogma, it is good that we do. That inner desire is a blessing.

◇ The question is how can we satisfy soul hunger?

✓ We try to fill the craving with tangible pleasures: food, drink, sex, sport, music, movies, drugs, and so on. Does it satiate our inner hunger?

✓ We try to fill the craving with possessions: our dream home, fast cars, electronics, and things of all kinds. Do they slake our deepest thirst?

✓ We try to fill the craving with prestige: school popularity, community approval, church acceptance. Does it make us whole?

✓ We try to fill the craving with power: authority at home, dominance in the office, impact at church, clout in the political system. Does it complete us?

✓ We try to fill the craving with people: fans, friends, lovers, spouses, and followers. Do they fill the void – all the way? Always and forever?

Still, many keep on desperately shoving coins in those slots, hoping the investment will finally pay off.

It is not that all these things are wrong. Most are given to us by the Creator for our enjoyment. In the right time, place, and proportion they are better than acceptable; they are positively good.

Yet they do not satisfy soul hunger. They were never intended to do so.

◇ What will fill the void?

☐ Hear the Word of the Lord in Matthew 5:6 ~ “**Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.**” Their hunger will be satisfied and their thirst slaked.

☹ Some listeners might choke on this Beatitude. To them, “**righteousness**” sounds about as appetizing as that legendary fruit cake that’s been in circulation for the past few centuries.

Frankly, I sympathize. The way some religious people misuse and abuse the word “**righteousness**” should make us vomit. (More about that later)

✧ But let us assume, for the sake of argument, that if something does not satisfy us, it was not what we desired in the first place. It follows that...

Tangible pleasure is not really our ultimate desire, even when we risk health and well-being to get it.

Possessions are not really our ultimate desire, even when we devote our lives to acquiring and protecting them.

Prestige is not really our ultimate desire, even when we shed blood, sweat and tears to achieve it.

Power is not really our ultimate desire, even when we lie, cheat, steal and kill to seize and keep it.

People are not really our ultimate desire, even when we violate our ethics and sacrifice our dignity to woo them.

☑ **“We are”** as C.S. Lewis noted, **“half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and lust and ambition when infinite joy is offered to us, like an ignorant child who wants to keep on making mud-pie in the slums because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a vacation at the beach.”**

⊛ If soul hunger cannot be filled by the items on this world’s menu, there are only two possibilities: either a) we are doomed to eternal spiritual starvation; or b) what we really desire is so different it must come from someone else.

That “someone” is God the Father, Son and H.S. **“Everybody’s got a hungry heart,”** but God created us and knows exactly what is needed to fill our souls.

☑ Blaise Pascal put it this way in his Pensees:

What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace? This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him...though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God himself.

☐ Jesus is the Son of God and Co-Creator of the human race. He took on flesh {Jn 10:10} **“that [we] may have life, and have it to the full.”** In Matthew 5:6 He says: **“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.”**

⊛ **“Everybody’s got a hungry heart.”** Know it or not – and most of us don’t! – Everybody hungers and thirst for righteousness.

⊖ Not the self-righteousness of those who presume that they are superior to other sinners.

⊖ Not the legalistic, constrictive “righteousness” of religious folk who assume it is all about what one does *not* do, who imagine they are right with God as long as they “Don’t smoke, drink, or chew, or go with girls who do.”

⊖ Not the exhausting works “righteousness” of those who attempt to earn God’s favor through correct doctrine and good deeds, who think true faith is all about going to church and being nice and giving a few dollars to the poor.

All that counterfeit righteousness turns our neighbors off to the real thing. What is more, it disgusts God, and it should stick in our collective craw.

✦ Biblical righteousness is entirely different. It is living in right relationship with God, self, and others. That is what people want, even when they cannot acknowledge it.

◆ It is living out the challenge of Micah 6:8: **“What does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”**

◆ It is obedience to the Great Commandments of Matthew 22:37-39: **“‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”**

★ Hence, Biblical righteousness is equally:

- ⊕ a state of being and a way of doing;
- ⊕ positive (striving for what is right) and negative (striving against what is wrong);
- ⊕ individual (changing lone Christ Followers) and communal (transforming families and churches);

⊕ private (shaping our sex lives, for example) and public (influencing our politics and economics).

⇒ We do not manufacture this. It is a gift from God. In Philippians 3 Paul dismisses the good works he did before He met Jesus as “garbage” so that, he writes, {3:9} **“I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own...but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.”**

Jesus means all that (and much more!) when He says, **“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.”**

🔑 Let’s not skip too lightly over that phrase, **“Hunger and thirst.”**

In first century Palestine a man with a regular job could afford to put meat on the table about once a week – but most were day laborers who lived hand-to-mouth. A substantial percentage of Jesus’ audience was only a step or two ahead of actual starvation. The need Jesus speaks of is the hunger of a man who cannot remember the last time he felt full.

Likewise, no one in the crowd could turn a tap and fill a glass with clear, cold water. They had to lug it from a well that might have been many blocks from their house. And when they were on the road and a dust storm hit, all they could do was hang on until they found water. The need Jesus speaks of is the thirst of a woman whose parched throat is swelling shut.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,” who ache and pine and pray for it, who passionately desire a right relationship with God, self, and others. *They* **“will be filled.”**

Oh, to **“hunger and thirst for righteousness”!** Sometimes I do. More often, I settle for less. But I want to **“hunger and thirst for righteousness.”**

🔑 As for the blessing, it {N.T. Wright, “The Mutilated Mountain,” 5/30/2009} **“doesn’t just mean ‘happiness’, though it does mean that too. It means that people who are [hungering and thirsting for righteousness] will be creating around them a world in which things [work] in the way God wants; and God himself will be mysteriously with them, operating through them, turning the world upside down – or rather, turning it the right way up at last.”**

The Lord God will grant their deepest desire. He will pour his goodness into their lives, filling them to overflowing.

“Everybody’s got a hungry heart,” including me and including you.

❓ How can we satisfy our soul hunger?

❓ What will fill the void?

Hear the Word of the Lord: **“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled”!**