

Matthew 5:6

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 21 August 2016

Preacher: Chris Roberts

[0 : 00] And I turn back to that passage that Marsha read for us earlier from Matthew chapter 5. Happiness is what life is about for many, isn't it?

As long as it makes you happy, that's the mantra for our day. And whatever we do, we want to try and make ourselves happy, don't we? I don't know what you think makes you happy. Some think get rich and get happy, don't they? Some think they need to be busy to be happy. Some want to be lazy. Some want to be single. Some want to be married. Children, no children. Some want to eat to be happy. Some want to diet to be happy. But whatever it is you do, the aim seems to be happiness, isn't it? But do you really know what makes you happy? How is your happiness project working out for you, in all honesty?

[1 : 06] Well, the secret of human happiness is wrapped up in these verses. A few weeks ago, we took our first look, didn't we, at this introduction to Jesus' famous sermon on the mount.

And in these blessed statements, Jesus opens up with a kind of pocket guide to the good life, to the blessed life, or to the happy life.

But we saw that this is not the kind of happiness that we grasp for in a moment, and then it slips away when life goes bad. This is not me-centred happiness.

This is God, Christ-centred happiness. And it comes from things that actually we normally try to avoid, because we think they make us unhappy.

Just look down the list. Blessed are those who are poor in spirit. Mourning, or grief.

[2 : 14] Meekness. Hunger. Persecution. Thirst. And all of these words are normally things that we draw a sad face next to, aren't they? But this is happiness, God's way.

This is true blessedness. The secret of human happiness is wrapped up in these verses. Last time we were in chapter 5, we looked at verse 4, didn't we?

Blessed are those who mourn. I want us to look particularly at verse 6 this morning. That is our text. Let me read that again. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

So, can we dive in and talk about the elephant in the room, please, straight away? Because there's a paradox here, isn't there? The paradox of this happiness Jesus speaks about is that it satisfies through hunger.

See that? That is the shock. We are happy, Jesus says, when we hunger and when we thirst. For this thing called righteousness.

[3 : 36] Righteousness. Now, there's a lot of things that that could mean. But in the context of this sermon and in Matthew's Gospel, righteousness, it means to be more like Jesus. It is a character trait.

It is to be godly like Jesus. And when we thirst and when we hunger for that, Jesus says, we are going to be blessed. We are going to be happy.

I don't know when the last time you felt real physical hunger or thirst was. I think it's quite hard for us to grasp that, isn't it?

In our culture, water and food, it is relatively easy to come by. But Jesus speaks to a culture here where the whole of life was arranged around the availability of water and of food.

This isn't the hunger of missing a meal or two or missing a snack. Get the sense of this here. Jesus is saying the secret of human happiness is to long for this righteousness.

[4 : 43] It is to long to be more like Jesus and to thirst for that in the same way that a starving man longs for food and nourishment.

Or a perishing woman languishes in the heat and in the dust for drink. It is to long for it like that.

And so the great challenge of this is that Jesus is not dealing with outward stuff, is he, in our lives? He's dealing with stuff that goes in our hearts for this true happiness.

He's asking you to do something on the inside. He is telling you, isn't he, to do something with your affections. Hunger and thirst, they're words that are to do with our cravings, aren't they?

And our desires. So it's not an easy thing to understand. It seems paradoxical, this happiness. But it's an even harder thing to actually do, isn't it?

[5 : 49] It's been said that the biggest barrier in the Christian life is the malady of not wanting. I mean, we love what we love, don't we?

And we hunger for what we hunger. You know, if you put a bacon sandwich or a lettuce sandwich in front of me, ten times out of ten, I know which one I'm going to go for.

And it isn't the green one. Now that is the problem, isn't it? We love what we want to love. And we can't change our desires, can we? And this is the challenge of this secret to happiness.

It is to have our desires and our affections changed and transformed. It's to stop loving the things actually we wish we didn't love.

And it's to love the things that God loves. So how on earth do we do this? How do we change what we love? How do we hunger to be more like Jesus for righteousness?

[6 : 50] Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. And three things. Number one, you won't be hungry for righteousness until you taste the meal.

You won't be hungry for righteousness until you taste the meal. Now as we thought about these things, I guess there are some people here actually who know exactly what I'm talking about.

You know what it is to hunger and thirst to be more like Jesus. You know you're not there yet. And there are things about yourself that you know God knows and you know that you wish would change.

You want to think more like Jesus. To obey and enjoy God more like Jesus. To love your enemies more like Jesus.

To be holy and set apart for God's service more like Jesus. To pray like Jesus. And we long for that, many of us.

[8 : 00] And we know what it's like to hunger for that. But actually, others of you here this morning don't really know what this is about. And you don't quite get this. Maybe it's in the same way that some of you might hunger for Sunday lunch round at Daphne's place after the service.

Isn't it? And some of you know what that's like. But actually, others of you don't. Because you've not had the pleasure yet. Some of you don't even know who Daphne is.

You don't know what I'm talking about. But if you do get an invitation, let me say, don't turn it down.

If you see the point here, you won't long for it until you know what it's like, will you?

Your mouth won't melt at the thought of a steak until you've tried a good one. You won't long for chocolate cake until you've tried it, until you've tasted it.

And you will not wake up one morning thinking, do you know what? I feel a bit peckish. I feel a bit partial to some righteousness this morning.

[9 : 06] Yeah, Friday's a good day for righteousness. I feel like I'm going to hunger for righteousness today. I'm going to thirst to be more like Jesus and get some of this secret happiness that he's been talking about in Matthew 5.

No, it doesn't work like that, does it? The odd thing about this hunger is that it begins with satisfaction of this righteousness before it becomes a hunger for this righteousness.

Now, if that sounds odd, in other words, you won't be hungry for it until you taste it. This hunger, it starts when you get a taste for Jesus.

Of the satisfaction and happiness it is to be more like him and to enjoy him. It's when we taste Jesus' food and drink in our lives.

And when we do that, there's this curious flavour that we haven't tasted before. And it tastes of satisfaction. There is something tasty about holiness.

[10 : 18] About living for God instead of eking my way through life in my own way. Under my own rules and laws. There is something delicious about loving God's ways more than my own.

And when you get a taste of that, you get a whiff of that and you start to think, hmm, this is tasty. This is good.

This righteousness is satisfying. Suddenly I'm tasting this righteousness. But this hunger, it doesn't come naturally. You won't hunger for it until you taste the meal.

Actually, it is a hunger that God has to give to you in the first place. You know, when we start off, our taste buds aren't tuned, are they, to this righteousness. Actually, the Bible says that we are unrighteous. In our confession of sin earlier on, we heard, didn't we, Paul say, none is righteous.

[11 : 22] No, no one is righteous. No one understands. No one seeks God. No one has the taste for God.

To be unrighteous, it means to have no appetite. Elsewhere, the Bible says, we are dead in our sins. That's how bad it is. And dead people don't get hungry. Naturally, we do not want to be like Jesus, do we? Naturally, we don't think this righteousness thing is tasty at all. Naturally, it tastes bitter.

And doing things our own way, the Bible calls that sin, that is tasty. And that is sweet. We want to live our own way, not God's way.

And righteousness is an acquired taste. And being a Christian, it means to have God deal with our own righteousness and give us his righteousness through Jesus.

[12 : 25] And when we taste what that is like, to be treated by God and to be thought of by God as he thinks about Jesus, in his righteousness, we want more.

We want to be more like Jesus. Our tastes are transformed. King David, in the Psalms, he says, taste and see that the Lord is good.

Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him. And just let me try and illustrate this. Imagine a family who, all they ever eat is beans on toast.

365 days a year. Every year for their lives. That's all they've eaten all their lives. And to be honest, they're fine with it. They like the toast.

They like the beans. And they've not tried anything else. And they don't want anything else. But then a generous, rich friend offers to give them something of what he eats every day.

[13 : 31] He says, guys, chuck away the beans on toast and try surf and turf. Just try surf and turf tonight. What on earth is surf and turf? He says, well, come on, it's lobster and steak.

I'm going to serve you fried potatoes with it with some truffles on the side. They've no idea what it is. It hasn't got toast in it. It hasn't got beans in it. It doesn't sound too nice.

Actually, they've never really liked those people who eat meat. And they thought that fish looks a bit boring. And they don't really want to go there. But nevertheless, the friend comes round.

And he puts some of his food on their table. He gives them some of his food. He pays for it. He owns it. And he gives it to them.

And they tuck in. And the world is changed, isn't it? But they taste it. And their taste buds are opened to see amazing new things.

[14 : 31] And after that, they want to trash the toast. And bin the beans. And eat proper stuff. And that is the thing here, isn't it?

You are not going to get this happiness until you are satisfied by this hunger for righteousness. But you will not get this hunger for righteousness until you taste the meal.

Until the Lord Jesus gives you his righteousness. And he puts it on your plate. The theological term for that is imputation.

It is when Jesus comes and his righteousness is put on us, on our dinner table. And God sees us as he sees Jesus. And as we trust in him, we get all of his righteousness loaded onto our dinner table. And when that happens, we get a taste for more. The hunger to be more like Jesus starts when you are satisfied with Jesus and his righteousness.

[15 : 36] It is an acquired taste. So you won't be hungry until you have tried the meal. Secondly, you won't be hungry just because you are empty.

You won't be hungry just because you are empty. You know, it is possible to be spiritually empty and not feel a thing. To have no hunger pangs.

Travelling down the north circular the other day. We knew the car was low on petrol. And it got to that moment where the gauge went into the red. And nothing seemed to change.

The car was running fine. And suddenly the bips came up on the screen. And we knew we were running on fumes. But the car was running on fine. And if you could have sort of asked the car, do you feel thirsty right now?

And the car could speak back to you. I am not sure it would say yes. It sort of behaved in the same way. You could still accelerate. Nothing seemed to change. And I guess the only time you are going

to know is when it finally coughs and splutters and it dies.

[16:45] Isn't it? And in the same way, it is possible to look pretty normal on the outside. But to be empty on the inside.

To be running on fumes spiritually. And actually not think anything of it. To be asked, do you feel thirsty? And you think, no. Being empty spiritually doesn't necessarily mean you are going to hunger for something else.

So the danger is that you might be here today and you might think, well, I'm well. I'm not hungry actually because I'm doing okay. But actually a lack of hunger is a dangerous, dangerous thing. It means something is not right, doesn't it? When you go to the doctors, what's the first thing they ask you? How are you eating? How's your appetite? Hunger is a good test of health.

Hunger is a sign of life. And the problem for some with Jesus is they can treat Christianity like a cookery TV show. Kind of flick it on. You see all the dishes served.

[17:53] Oh yeah, that looks great. But you never actually eat any of it, do you? You never actually grab it and take it for yourself. It is what Jesus says to one of the churches in Revelation chapter 3.

To the church in Laodicea. He says that you say, I am rich. I've prospered. I need nothing. Not realising that you are wretched. Piteable, poor, blind and naked. You see the church in Laodicea, they were running on empty but they didn't know it.

They didn't thirst for this righteousness. I don't know, maybe you know folk like that. I wonder if that's you this morning. It can be so tragic, can't it?

It can come in different ways. For some, you can actually be in church but you can crave controversy and discussion about all sort of conspiracy theories and theology.

[18:54] You can pick bones with people, can't you? You can pick bones but never actually eat the meat off the bone. For some, it's a case of sheer laziness, isn't it, if we're honest?

Or weariness. There's a clip online of a toddler who is at the dinner table who is so tired that he face plants into his bolognese. And then he sleeps in his kind of warm tomato pillow.

And some of us are like that, aren't we? We can be so lazy, we're like that fool in Proverbs who puts his hand in the honey and doesn't lift it to his mouth. Not actually eating by faith.

Not actually taking in the things that Jesus gives to us on his table. For others it's entertainment, it's recreation, isn't it? It's like the parent who calls the child in.

Dinner's ready. Dinner's ready, it's on the table. But the football game, the TV, whatever it is, is too important and the food goes uneaten. You know, just because you're empty it won't automatically mean you are hungry.

[20:03] You might think, I'm doing okay. But you won't be hungry until you taste this meal. And you won't be hungry just because you're empty if you think you're okay.

And the last thing, thirdly, you won't be hungry when you're already full. You won't be hungry when you're already full. It might be that you've not tasted this righteousness yet.

And maybe you don't realise you need it. Maybe you don't realise you're empty. Or actually, maybe you're already full of other stuff. And that's the problem.

Just imagine turning up to a party. You get invited round. And they lay on a great spread. They're a good host. You turn up. You sit on the table. And as the food is brought out, you actually say, Do you know what?

I'm really sorry. I've already eaten. There's nothing more embarrassing than that, isn't it? And it's an uncomfortable experience as well. To bloat yourself when you've already eaten.

[21:06] It's just not pleasurable, is it? But you're not hungry when you've already eaten. And sadly, that is how some of us treat God, isn't it?

You say, thank you for this offer of satisfaction. Thank you for this offer of blessing. But sorry, Lord, I've already eaten. You won't be hungry if you're already full. What could it be that we are eating and drinking instead of this righteousness that Jesus gives us?

I guess it could be secular stuff, couldn't it? You know, our tastes tune, don't they, to what we eat most of? Maybe that's it. Maybe we've got an unhealthy appetite for stuff.

Material things. Maybe physical food and drink or things or prestige or whatever it is. Maybe that's it. It could be that. I wonder though whether actually our biggest craving, most of us here, is a craving for, not a secular thing, but a religious thing.

Maybe it's a craving for another kind of righteousness that Jesus is not talking about here. A righteousness that isn't quite righteousness.

[22 : 24] A kind of fake righteousness. A righteousness that bloats us up and fills us up so that we don't hunger for Jesus' righteousness, for the real thing.

Jesus calls this false righteousness. He rebukes the Pharisees for it, doesn't he, in the Gospels, for filling up on false righteousness instead of feeding off of him.

And this false righteousness, it was served up in three ways. Three kinds of dish that you could eat. There was superficial righteousness. He says, you know, you wash cups and plates, but your heart is dirty.

Just outside stuff. Just an outward veneer of righteousness. It's doing religion, isn't it, without the faith and the trust in the heart of Jesus.

The second dish, selective righteousness. You tithe mint and cumin, but you neglect the weightier matters of the law. It's having sort of unhealthy spiritual obsessions about rituals and ceremonies or traditions.

[23 : 35] But neglecting the weightier matters of love. Loving others. Loving God. Loving, seeking justice. Loving God's people. Selective righteousness.

It could be dessert dish, couldn't it? Self-centred righteousness. You know that when Jesus scathes on the Pharisees for public praying, which is designed to show off.

They love to stand on the street corners that they may be seen by others. I wonder whether we treat church like that sometimes, as a kind of old-fashioned social club. To show off our righteousness in some way.

Thomas Watson, the Puritan writer, he writes, If a friend invites guests to his table, he doesn't expect that he should bring them money for the meal. Only come with an appetite.

Only come with an appetite. But I wonder if some of us are saying, Do you know what, Lord? Thank you, but I've already eaten. And some of us are so full of superficial, selective, self-centred righteousness, aren't we?

[24 : 48] That we're bloated up. And we cannot enjoy, we cannot hunger for this real, homemade righteousness. Of Jesus. This righteousness is something that only God can give us.

And as we come to Jesus and feed on him, by faith and trust. So to finish, this happiness, this blessing, is blessing not our way, but God's way, isn't it?

And notice how Jesus says, does not say, Blessed are those who search for blessing. It's interesting that, isn't it? Our goal in life cannot actually be our happiness.

It seems odd. But our goal cannot be our happiness. Because then we will never ever find it. Our goal actually needs to be, to be more like Jesus and to grow and enjoy this righteousness.

And this is the secret of human happiness. So the challenge is this morning, what is happening with your desires? And if your hunger is not satisfied by God, perhaps God is not satisfied with your hunger.

[26 : 08] Maybe you need to taste this meal for the first time. Maybe you've had this meal before, but you've lost your appetite. And you can remember those times when you're used to hunger and thirst for righteousness so much more.

Well, the same rule applies, doesn't it? You won't be hungry until you taste the meal. It's a hunger to be more like Jesus. It starts when you are satisfied with Jesus.

And you come to him in trust and in faith. Let's pray together.