

CRAVING THE KINGDOM MATTHEW 5:6

Something very profound happened to me when I met Mindy and we fell in love with each other. I was catapulted into a whole new world—a world that was altogether different than the one to which I had been accustomed. She was interested in things that had never crossed my mind. She was passionate about things that prior to this had only made me yawn. Her way of viewing things and doing things were unlike anything I had ever seen before.

But I was intrigued and attracted by all of this, so much so that I was compelled to adopt her interests and passions as my own and to order my life around the things that were important and precious to her.

For example, when I was in college I had an opportunity to travel to Hawaii to play baseball. I had never been to Hawaii before. Mindy had been there a number of times with her family, and it was especially memorable and meaningful to Mindy because Hawaii reminded her of her dad, who had passed away just a few months earlier. She was still grieving her loss.

Mindy was excited that I was going, and before I left she gave me a list of a few things that had special significance to her—things that I might want to see for myself. One of those things was a large rock on the shore of Hilo, into which her dad had carved his name during World War 2.

I can't tell you how many hours I spent combing the beach looking for that rock. I can tell you this: I gave up a game of golf with my teammates; I gave up a tour of some of the more prominent spots on the island, because I was determined to find that rock.

I know what you're thinking. "You spent your time in Hawaii looking for a dumb rock? You're nuts!"

Maybe. But it wasn't the rock. It was what that rock stood for. That rock was precious to the person that was most precious to me. That rock had special significance to the family to which I might one day belong. And I knew that if I could find it, it would give me some kind of connection with her, her family, and her past that would be very satisfying to me and meaningful to her. (Incidentally, I *did* find it.)

When your spiritual eyes are opened to understand that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and that He is God's provision for your salvation; when you begin to comprehend just how glorious and how wonderful He is; when you begin to understand how much Jesus loves you and how that love was demonstrated by what He did for you, you cannot help but be profoundly changed. Especially because when you receive Him He makes you a new creature—with new perspectives, priorities, desires, values, capabilities. His interests become your interests, His passions your passions. What is precious to Him becomes precious to you. What He is doing you want to be doing.

In short, you want to be connected to Him in whatever way you can. That connection is what drives you, motivates you, satisfies you, and sustains you. That connection is so important to you that other things pale in comparison. You will not be content unless you are about His business.

That is one of the signs of those who have been truly born again. It is one of the indications of a kingdom person.

Jesus talks about this in the fourth beatitude of His Sermon on the Mount. **Matthew**

5:1-6. *Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.* ² *And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:* ³ *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* ⁴ *Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.* ⁵ *Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.* ⁶ *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”*

I want to remind you that these are the attitudes of those who have encountered the kingdom and become kingdom people. They are the qualities of individuals whose eyes have been opened to see the truth. Poor in spirit (v. 3) describes those who have seen the truth about themselves, that they are morally and spiritually bankrupt and in desperate need of a Savior because there is nothing about them or in them that would commend them to God and earn His favor.

Those who mourn (v. 4) describes those who have seen the truth about the world, that the world and the people who inhabit it are under the curse of sin and the dominion of Satan, and that without God’s gracious intervention they are destined to perish in a place of eternal torment.

The meek (v. 5) describes those who see the truth about other people, that though these people are victims of sin’s curse and Satan’s dominion, they are also made in the image of God and are precious to Him, deserving of respect, honor, and dignity.

This morning we will discover that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (v. 6) describes people who see the truth about the kingdom of God. They see the kingdom and they *crave* the kingdom.

In this beatitude Jesus uses a couple of metaphors that describe a particular kind of desire—a powerful, intense, all-consuming kind of desire. This is *not* the kind of hunger you feel when I preach too long, or the kind your kids have when they come in from playing and say, “I’m starving!” This is a hunger and thirst that comes from deprivation—the kind that produces a gnawing sensation in your belly, a parched throat, a swollen tongue. Jesus is talking about an intense *craving* for food and drink—a craving so strong that it is always on your mind.

When we lived in Africa we saw this kind of hunger almost every day. Everywhere we went we would be accosted by hungry people. They would approach us on the street, in our car, at our home. We had people knocking on our gate almost every day—the same people with the same request and the same tone of voice. “Gimme food!”

Sometimes I tried to engage these people in normal conversation. I wanted to befriend them. I wanted a relationship that went beyond their pleas for food. But I was rarely successful. Because when you are that hungry and that desperate you simply cannot think about other things. You have one thing on your mind—“How can I satisfy this hunger? How can I fill this emptiness?” Everything else pales in comparison.

Jesus says, “Blessed are those who have such a longing for righteousness they cannot think about much else. Blessed are those for whom righteousness is their sustenance. Their desire for it is not half-hearted or fleeting. Blessed are those who want it so bad they are not truly content unless they have it.”

The obvious next question is, what is this “*righteousness*?”

The word “righteousness” is used in a number of ways in Scripture. It sometimes refers to our legal standing before God—the righteousness of Jesus that is imputed to us. It sometimes refers to personal righteousness—the holiness, goodness, and justice that are displayed in our attitudes and actions.

But I believe the context of the Sermon on the Mount indicates that the righteousness Jesus had in mind here is specifically *kingdom* righteousness—the righteousness of God that characterizes and accompanies His kingdom.

Remember, the kingdom is the subject of Jesus' sermon, here. He is describing the attitudes of people who have been delivered from the kingdom of darkness—a kingdom ruled by Satan and dominated by evil—and who have been brought into the kingdom of light, where righteousness, truth, and justice prevail.

Last week I highlighted Jesus' statement that the only way people can enter the kingdom is by being born again. Jesus says that the Spirit of God takes people who are under the curse of sin and the dominion of Satan, and makes them into new and different persons. He gives them new natures that have a propensity for righteousness and holiness. He gives them a new operating systems—Himself—enabling them to think and be and do what is right.

And because those persons have a new nature, a new identity, a new allegiance, a new destiny, they are not content to occupy themselves with the temporal things in this earth realm. They are all about the kingdom. They want to see the kingdom progress and advance, and anything which hinders that progress and advancement is of great concern to them. What is more, they want the King to be honored supremely. They want His priorities to be established and His will to be done.

That's why kingdom people have such an abhorrence for sin. They now see sin for what it is, and want no part of it. They see what sin has done to the world God created for His own glory and pleasure, how it has obscured His glory and broken His heart, and it breaks their hearts as well. And because they see sin for what it is, in all its ugliness and destructiveness, they want to see it eradicated and replaced with righteousness.

And that is what Jesus is talking about in this verse. Blessed are those who long for the day when this world shall no longer be under the curse of sin and the dominion of Satan. Blessed are those who cannot wait until the earth is thoroughly and completely purged from evil. Blessed are those who long to see the King come and fully and completely establish His righteousness—when God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven.

It is evident from the text that our blessing is, in some measure, proportionate to the degree in which we crave the kingdom of God. Again, I'm not talking about a craving for your own *personal* righteousness, or a craving for your family or community to be righteous. I'm talking about wanting God's righteousness to pervade every square millimeter of this universe so that there is not even a shadow of evil. I'm talking about a comprehensive, pervasive righteousness that so saturates the world that everything in it is dripping with God's righteousness. I'm talking about His kingdom coming in fullness.

Do you crave the kingdom? Are you passionate about the righteousness of God?

That's a sign that you are truly born again. I believe that's one of the reasons why Jesus uses these metaphors. Hunger and thirst are instinctive impulses of anyone who is alive. The first impulse of infants is to suck. The second impulse is to cry because they're hungry. It's natural for every living thing to hunger for that which sustains and satisfies them.

The sustenance for one who has been born of God is the righteousness of God. We are content and satisfied with nothing less than God's kingdom come, His will being done on earth as it is in heaven.

If you have no longing for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven, no appetite for His kingdom, no yearning for His righteousness to drench this world, then perhaps you

need to check your spiritual pulse to see whether you're really alive.

Someone sarcastically said, "How nice to feel nothing, and still get credit for being alive" (Kurt Vonnegut). Christians *ought* to feel something about kingdom righteousness. We ought to have a craving for it. That's an attitude of kingdom people.

And do you know *why* that is? It's very simple. Kingdom people crave righteousness because they love their King.

For the Apostles, who knew more about the kingdom than anybody, it always came back to a Person. Peter, who was writing to persecuted people in his first letter, was describing the inheritance that belonged to them and to which they could look forward. But he summed it up by saying, "*For though you have not yet seen [Jesus], you love him, and even though you do not see him now you believe in him, and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy...*" (1:8). For Peter, it was all about Jesus.

And when Paul was giving his personal testimony to the Philippians he told them that his greatest ambition was to know Christ and be with Christ. He said, "*For to me to live is Christ*" (1:13). For Paul, too, it was all about Jesus. For anyone who has been born again and become a kingdom person, it's all about Jesus. We crave the kingdom because we love our King.

For the last nine months I have had a near obsession with the country of Turkey. I think about it and pray for it almost every day. I call a Turkish phone number three or four times a week. I am learning basic greetings and phrases in the Turkish language. I have an app on my phone that tells me what the weather is like in Turkey on any given day. I'm currently reading a book about the country's president and political situation. I listen to BBC news because I am more likely to hear reports about what is happening in Turkey. My home is filling up with Turkish rugs and pillows and pots and lamps. I now fly Turkish Airlines on my way to Africa, not because it is more comfortable and convenient, but because the stopover is in Istanbul rather than Amsterdam.

I do these things for *one* reason. Because for the last nine months, some of my dearest and most precious loved ones have lived in Turkey, and they plan to live there for a long time—my son, and daughter-in-law and grandson and granddaughter.

I am interested in Turkey, I give my attention to Turkey, I surround myself with Turkish things, and I try to spend as much time as I can *in* Turkey because some of the people I love the most live there. Turkey is precious to me, because those people are precious to me.

The same is true for kingdom people. Kingdom people crave righteousness because they love their King, who is righteous. Kingdom people yearn for His kingdom to come, a kingdom that will firmly and forever establish His righteousness, because they love their King, and want to be with Him.

The beatitude closes with a promise. **Verse 6.** ***6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."***

Kingdom people have hunger pains right now. Sometimes those hunger pains intensify when we see the powerful grip that sin has on our world.

But kingdom people are blessed because they know that, one day, the kingdom is going to come. The trumpet is going to sound, the clouds will be rolled back as a scroll, and Jesus is going to appear for all the world to see Him. And right then and there, every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that He is, indeed, the Lord of heaven and earth.

Count on it. Be absolutely sure of it. And when He comes we will not be disappointed. We will be completely satisfied. Our hunger and thirst will be satiated, forever. We will eat

of the fruit of the tree of life and drink from the springs of living water, and when we do, we will never be hungry and thirsty again.

“Craving the Kingdom” Matthew 5:6

Main Idea: Kingdom people crave righteousness because they love their King, who is righteous, and are desperate for His kingdom to come.

The Pronouncement: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness”

The metaphors of “hunger” and “thirst”

An intense _____ for food and drink—a _____ so strong it is always on your mind

The meaning of “righteousness”

_____ righteousness—the righteousness of God that characterizes his _____

The reason for the craving

Kingdom people crave righteousness because they _____ their _____

The Promise: “They shall be satisfied”

When Jesus comes

Eating of the tree of life

Drinking from the Spring of Living Water

Family Life Groups

Matthew 5:6

Main Idea: Kingdom people crave righteousness because they love their King, who is righteous, and are desperate for His kingdom to come.

Matthew 5:6: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied”

Do you crave righteousness? Why or why not? How does someone develop a craving for righteousness?

Pastor Stan suggested that kingdom people crave righteousness because they love their King, who is righteous, and are desperate for his kingdom to come. Do you long for Jesus' coming? How often do you think about it? How can the coming of Jesus be more prominent in our thinking?