

Wanting It All

Matthew 5:1-12 (*The Message*)

Ephesians 3:14-21

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*“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst
for righteousness,
it is they who will be filled.”*

(Matthew 5:6)

When I went to serve First Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, I found I had a built-in secretary. She was retirement age, but agreed to stay during all my years of service there.

Her name was Naomi. She was trim and tailored and looked fifteen years *younger* than she actually was. Once I had occasion to ask how she had stayed...well...so slender. Out came one of those priceless answers.

“I’ve just stayed hungry
for fifty years!”

*“Blessed are those who hunger
and thirst for righteousness,
it is they who will be filled.”*

We wouldn’t have put it that way. We’d have said, it’s only when you’ve got God fully in your life that you are blessed. But that’s *not* what this Beatitude says. It says we are blessed by desperately *wanting* God in our life.

So here is the principle. What Christ is willing to do for us must await our wanting him to do it. *Christ wants us to ‘hunger and thirst’ for God.*

In order for us to hear the urgency in Jesus voice, I’d like to recast this familiar Beatitude into some fresh language.

*If, with everything there is in you,
you want everything
God has for you,
then you shall have it.*

Wanting

*If with everything there is in you,
you want.*

Jesus was speaking to a crowd made up mostly of farmers who were trying to scratch a living out of dry ground. When Jesus talked to them about *hunger* they understood! Sometimes their harvest was meager, their barns were empty and their food was sparse.

They knew hunger. You and I don't. In America we are over-fed and under-nourished. Our grocery store shelves groan under the weight of more food than any of us can buy and consume before it goes bad. For us hunger is no crisis.

Jesus' audience also knew *thirst*. They lived in a desert land. To be sure, here and there across the land was a spring or a well. But for the most part the countryside was bone dry.

They understood thirst. We don't. Our spigots, water fountains and plastic bottles make pure water easily accessible to everyone. In this country thirst is not a crisis.

This is why I'm restating this Beatitude using language that reflects the desperation of Jesus' original words – *if with everything there is in you, you want*.

Perhaps Joilene Spoilers can teach us about this kind of wanting. She was at work six weeks ago when News came that her small village in Washington State had been crushed under an avalanche of mud. Her husband and three of her four children were instantly suffocated.

But where was her four-year-old son, Jacob? She had no idea

he had already been found chest-deep in sucking mud, rescued and rushed to the hospital. She did not yet know the last member of her family was still alive!

So she did what any mother would do, she began a desperate and frantic search. With everything there was in her she wanted only one thing – to find Jacob, the last – the only! – remaining member of her family.

Jesus is saying if you've ever had an experience like that, if you can even *imagine* having an experience like that, then treasure it, relive it, taste it all over again. For the way you *wanted* in that desperate moment is the way our Lord wants us to want God.

Wanting God

*If with everything there is in you,
you want – what? – want
everything God has for you!*

This is not my idea of what this Beatitude says. This is *exactly* what this Beatitude says! Let's talk grammar a moment.

In the Greek language of the New Testament the verbs '*to hunger and thirst*' regularly take the genitive case. In English that is usually an 'of' phrase. If I speak of a glass of water, the '*of water*' part is the genitive case.

Technically this is called a ‘partitive genitive.’ Why? It’s not complicated. If you are hungry you don’t need the entire bakery, you’d be happy with *a slice of bread*, a part of it.

If you are thirsty, you don’t need the whole lake, you’d be grateful for *a cup of water*, a part of it. It’s a ‘partitive genitive.’

But in this Beatitude, the verbs ‘*to hunger*’ and ‘*to thirst*’ don’t take the normal genitive case. The word “*righteousness*” is in the accusative case.

(Someone out there is itching to say, “Who cares? Genitive – accusative, what difference does it make? Get on with it!” Okay I will.)

When the Greek verbs to ‘*hunger and thirst*’ take the accusative case, it does not mean I’ll be happy with a little part of it thank you very much. It specifically, grammatically and literally means I will only be happy with all of it!

Jesus promises a blessing *not* on those who say they’d like a bit of God in their life wherever they can work God into an already overcrowded schedule. The blessing here is reserved for those who want everything God has for them.

Wanting All of God

Perhaps an illustration would help at this point. It still surprises me that I preach and you listen! As a kid I wasn’t sure anybody was interested in what I had to say. And, if truth be told, I didn’t have very much to say.

I was one of those youngsters who was so painfully shy it terrified me to get up in front of people. I would hide in the back of the class hoping the teacher would not call me up front to give my report. I hated doing that.

Which goes to prove, I suspect, God has a sense of humor! Late in my teens the Lord tapped me on the shoulder and said in effect, ‘Paul, guess what I want you to do for the rest of your life?’ And so it began.

The first little church I served expected me to get up every Sunday of the world and preach a brand new sermon! I remember pleading, “O God, can you give me twenty-minutes worth of a sermon for Sunday morning?”

God said, “Yes, I can do that; *is that all you want?*”

From the beginning of my ministry I determined to preach without manuscript or notes. It was terrifying! In the early years,

I often felt naked and alone up there. I used to beg, “O God, can you help me remember what I wanted to tell people on Sunday morning?”

God said, “Yes, I can do that; *is that all you want?*”

It quickly became obvious I did not have the gift of telling the story. But a preacher *must* be able to do this, otherwise people will never know this faith leaves footprints in the real world. So I pleaded, “O God, can you show me how to illustrate what I’m trying to say, so that at least I won’t bore people to death!”

And God said, “Yes, I can do that; *is that all you want?*”

Wanting God’s Fullness

I was a Presbyterian minister of the Word and Sacraments for eight years before I even began to understand God’s question, “*Is that all you want?*”

At last it came to me, God doesn’t care how long I preach, or what process I use, or whether I tell colorful stories or not.

What God wants is for us to ‘hunger’ for his saving purpose in our lives, and ‘thirst’ for his loving compassion.

In other words, God wants to fill us with Himself, so that His grace blesses us and then overflows into the lives of others.

Were you as surprised as I to hear St. Paul pray for us a moment ago? He prayed:

*“that you and I
may be filled with
all the fullness of God”!*

If words mean anything, this is the most startling sentence ever penned. How can God’s ‘fullness’ fit into your little life and mine?

Perhaps there may be a clue from my boyhood life in Miami. At that time we were members of the Shenandoah Presbyterian Church. Every Sunday we sang the chorus we’ll use following this sermon. Whatever else we sang in Worship, we *always* sang –

*“Spirit of the Living God
Fall Afresh on Me.”*

It was only after I grew up a bit that I finally realized why we always sang this chorus.

We sang it because it was written by the pastor of our church – that’s why! If he wrote it, we’re singing it! His name was Daniel Iverson. His name always appears at the top of this chorus. He was my Pastor.

Wanting God's Spirit

He wrote the words and music of this chorus in the space of ten minutes while attending a conference in Orlando back in 1926. He was a strong preacher and Bible teacher, but he is remembered today mostly for this little chorus God gave him in a ten-minute period of time.

Alas, down through the years, Iverson's original words have been altered a bit. The first line, repeated twice, is fine,

*"Spirit of the Living God
fall afresh on me."*

Then there follows the third line,

*"Melt me,
mold me, fill me, use me."*

But that's *not* what I grew up singing. Those aren't exactly Iverson's words. That's not what's chiseled onto his tombstone outside Montreat, NC. What Iverson actually wrote was,

*"Break me,
melt me, mold me, fill me."*

Why "*break me*"? Because Iverson was a Presbyterian, as am I.

Just speaking personally, at times I've known myself to have been filled far too much with self-congratulatory pride.

When pride is shattered, God gathers up our broken pieces melts and molds us into an open vessel. Then God fills us with the Spirit of Christ so that our lives are refreshed and empowered for His service.

This is what Christ wants us to '*hunger and thirst*' for. Our Lord has promised that:

*"If with everything there is in you,
you want everything
God has for you,
then you shall have it."*

for

*"Blessed are those who
hunger and thirst
for righteousness,
it is they who will be filled."*