

Sermon File # 752

Scripture Text: Matthew 5:6 (Scripture Reading: 5:1-6)

Sermon Title: *The Blessing of True and Everlasting Satisfaction*

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At International Baptist Church of Brussels, Belgium

On Sunday morning 8 February 2009

Sources cited in this manuscript are listed at the end. Scripture references, unless otherwise noted, are from the New International Version.

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The Blessing of True and Everlasting Satisfaction

Introduction:

Open your Bibles with me as we continue our series of sermons from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, and more specifically from the Beatitudes in Matthew 5. We've noted how that Jesus gathered his disciples around him to describe this new life in the Kingdom of God that is to be radically different from the culture around them. Although this sermon was heard by the multitude on that Galilean hillside, the life that Jesus describes in this sermon is possible only for those who have made a life-changing commitment to follow Jesus as Lord.

As we've also come to understand, the Beatitudes describe the characteristics of the people God blesses, that is, bestows with deep and lasting joy. The Beatitudes are God's blessings and "congratulations" upon the life that pleases him, that gains his favor, which results in the unfettered and undisturbed happiness we call joy. We've observed that God's blessings come to those who are poor in spirit, realizing their desperate need for and absolute dependence on God; upon those who mourn over their sinfulness and also over their sorrow that comes to all in this sin-damaged world; upon the meek and humble, who submit to God and his sovereign control over life and circumstances that seem so unjust and out of control. For these God gives a place in his kingdom, the comfort of his

loving presence and the assurance that this world and the renewed earth belong to them. We've noted that these Beatitudes are filled with irony, with the kingdom belonging to the poor, comfort for the brokenhearted, and the earth for those who submit to those who are grabbing all they can get. Also, we see the great reversal of the plight of God's people. The Kingdom of God, in God's time and way, reverses the condition of the poor, brokenhearted and humble to one of riches, comfort, and joint-ownership with Christ over his remade creation.

Follow as I read from the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, giving the context of this fourth Beatitude. Read **Matthew 5:1-6**.

To understand and fully appreciate the words of Jesus today about the blessing of satisfaction from hunger and thirst we must cross the gap (the hermeneutical gap) between first century Palestine and Western Europe and North America today. In the arid world of first century Palestine, life-threatening hunger and thirst from drought were a constant threat, which made them powerful images for the psalmists, the prophets and for Jesus himself (Ryken et al, 411f, 864f). And the imagery of hunger and thirst may be real for some of you whose home countries are vulnerable to drought and famine. But for others of us, to understand real hunger and thirst we must employ some imagination.

This past week a Flemish news channel reported on its web site that "Belgians Are Too Fat!" All Belgians together, it said, weigh about 45,000 tons too much, according to the Foundation against Cancer. Obesity, it says, often results in breast and colon cancer, plus other diseases. One out of two adult Belgians weighs too much, and 15% of children are too fat. This foundation is concerned because cancer strikes more than 50,000 people a year in Belgium (www.vtm.be).

Lest we Americans feel too smug, we need to be reminded that 2 out of 3 Americans are overweight or obese, according to the Surgeon General of the US. And he expressed deep concern in his report to Congress because obesity is the fastest growing cause of disease and untimely death. American obesity is caused in large part by lack of physical activity and by unhealthy eating habits. Just as in Belgium, 15% of American children are overweight and nearly 3 out of 4 overweight teens are liable to become overweight adults (www.surgeongeneral.gov).

Hunger and thirst are foreign to many of us here today because we are accustomed to easy access to too much food and drink. This past week, a repairman came to our door to tell us that, because of some repairs he was doing down the street, our water would be shut off for about two hours. I appreciated the warning, but we were inconvenienced by not being able to shower, wash clothes and do other routines. We take food and water for granted and our thirst is more of a temporary discomfort, whereas for Jesus' audience these were always present, life-threatening possibilities.

But once again, Jesus speaks about a great Kingdom-of-God reversal, a divine beatitude and blessing. Those who are desperately hungry and thirsty will be filled with true and lasting satisfaction. We know that Jesus cared about and ministered to the hungry and thirsty and calls us to share his concern for the "least

of these” who have physical needs (Matthew 25:31ff). But here in our text Jesus is giving his Beatitude, a pronouncement of his blessing, on those who hunger, not for physical bread and water, but for righteousness. Those who are in danger of death by spiritual starvation or dehydration are promised that they will be fully satisfied.

Join me as we look together at this 4th Beatitude that promises true and lasting satisfaction. Note first...

➤ **The pursuit of satisfaction**

The Words of the text describe a desperate type of hunger and thirst, as if those in pursuit will perish if they don't find food and water soon. Jesus implies that everyone is spiritually hungry and thirsty, but neglecting that hunger and thirst and seeking satisfaction in the wrong places. This pursuit of satisfaction is...

- *By secular outsiders*

The world apart from Christ is in a desperate pursuit of satisfaction and is looking in every place but the right one. Many are seeking satisfaction through educational or career achievement, through romance, sexual exploits, travel, entertainment, pleasure in food, or escape from pain through alcohol or drugs. Some are seeking their dream through the acquirement of wealth and luxury, which in this present economic climate, seems more elusive than ever. Any or all of these may bring momentary pleasure and a sense of achievement, but none can bring the satisfaction that God alone can give.

As the well-known quote of Augustine (354-430), Bishop of Hippo, states it: “Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee.”

We can paraphrase Jesus to say, God made us for a personal relationship with him, and our hearts are desperately hungry and thirsty until they find satisfaction in him. This is what Jesus told the desperately thirsty woman at Jacob's well, that she needed, far more than the water from the well, the Source of living water that would spring up within her to eternal life. Jesus himself is that source she had been searching for, yet she had futilely sought satisfaction through relationships with different men, which all ended in bitter disappointment. Williams paraphrases Jesus saying to the woman, “*If you only knew* the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water” (John 4:10).

Jesus came to bring himself as the source of living water, eternal life, to all who were aware of their thirst, and most of these were sinners who knew they were sinners, outcasts of doubtful reputation. And Jesus stood in the midst of a crowd during the Feast of Tabernacles and offered himself as the source of living water, eternal life and life by the Spirit of God (John 7:37ff). And many came to him as the answer to their spiritual thirst. Of course, many others refused to come to Jesus as the Bread of life, who offered himself as the source of true satisfaction

through a life-changing relationship with him. Most wanted only momentary and physical satisfaction that Jesus gave through his miraculous feeding of the 5,000 (Mark 6:30ff) and later the 4,000 (Mark 8:1ff). When Jesus began to talk about a spiritual relationship as his followers, most of the people “no longer followed him” (John 6:66). These went away, condemning themselves to be forever dissatisfied, continuing their desperate but futile pursuit to satisfy their hunger and thirst.

But this pursuit to satisfy in the wrong places is being done also...

- *By religious insiders*

As was true in Jesus' days on earth, so is it true today, that those who hear the Scriptures and the offer of Jesus continue to ignore his offer and to seek satisfaction in the wrong places. Many of the religious leaders took offense at Jesus' offer of himself as the missing ingredient in their lives and religious devotion. They were subsisting on a diet of dead traditions and were refusing the Bread of Life, and the Living Water and the spiritual feast that Jesus could provide. This was due to pride and unbelief. Many had no appetite for the real and lasting satisfaction that God could give and were oblivious to the fact that they were dying of starvation and dehydration.

The religious, who had the opportunity to hear and receive the nourishment and life of God, rejected it and consequently were dying spiritually. They were dying from spiritual anorexia nervosa, a deadly psychological illness by which those with this eating disorder starve themselves to death.

Similarly, there are many who call themselves Christians, who may even be regular in church attendance and might serve in the church's organization, who are spiritually hungry, thirsty and dying because they have no personal relationship with Jesus and seek to sublimate this serious deficiency through artificial substitutes, such as church busy-ness. The spiritually starving in the churches pose a threat to harmony and fellowship because of their deep misery and void of the real life of God in their lives. These are the spiritually starving and dead church people, who have no appetite for the things of God and of the Spirit. They are condemned to spiritual emptiness and their disregard for spiritual food is a sign that they have no spiritual life. They are unconverted church members.

And there are also those in the church who are always looking for satisfaction and maybe they come across as spiritually minded people because they want to be fed from the word of God. Yet what they desire is to order from a spiritual menu of their own choosing. They missed the first three Beatitudes, where Jesus offers God's blessings to the poor in spirit, the mourning, and the humble (3-5). These people go from church to church, complaining that the previous church failed to “feed” them. And their present church is always under their scrutiny as they evaluate everything, from worship to church programs, on the basis of their being fed or satisfied. This is the consumer mindset that has been plaguing churches in North America. These people are suffering from and even bloating themselves with spiritual junk food. Kent Hughes reminds us of the cliché often heard: “You are what you eat,” and if we fail to follow Jesus' menu of seeking true

righteousness and a life that pleases him, we will be either spiritual midgets, anorexics or unhealthily bloated and overweight (p. 39f).

Michael Green notes that Jesus says, blessed are the hungry and thirsty and “not the bloated” (p. 90). And yet there are a lot of religious insiders, church goers, who are bloated in self-indulgence and seeking to gratify themselves their way instead of God’s way. The satisfaction that Jesus offers in this Beatitude is not satisfaction that we order from some type of consumerist menu, ordering to suit our personal taste. The satisfaction that Jesus offers is a result, a blessed result, of our taking...

➤ **God’s pathway to satisfaction**

We are not to hunger for satisfaction through a particular experience, but rather to hunger and thirst for righteousness. D Martin Lloyd-Jones was an esteemed young medical doctor before he became a minister and eventually pastor of Westminster Chapel in London. He notes the “pleasure mania” that plagues a lot of churches, but says that the pathway to real and lasting satisfaction is often one of pain and not pleasure. He says that in treating a patient the doctor seeks to treat the disease and not primarily the symptom of pain and that pain is a vital messenger to find the cause and cure (pp. 75f)

Those who want only pleasure and who seek satisfaction itself will miss out on God’s true and lasting satisfaction, which comes only through seeking...

- *The righteousness from God*

Five times in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus uses the word “righteousness,” so we have an informative context for the meaning of this important word. The righteousness we are to seek first of all is the righteousness that comes from God alone. This is the right standing that God gives to those who come to him with repentance and trust what he alone can give us—his forgiveness and a right standing with him. This forensic or judicial sense of God’s imputed, conferred righteousness is perhaps included in the righteousness that surpasses that of the Pharisees and teachers of the law, who depended on their own efforts to gain favor with God (5:20). This righteousness, this right standing with God, is by grace alone and comes by faith alone (Romans 3:21ff).

The hunger and thirst for righteousness begins at the point when God gives us his gift of righteousness, accompanied by his work of regeneration in our hearts. We cannot have this imputed, judicial righteous standing with God without being converted into new creatures, with the now indwelling Holy Spirit. And we have assurance that we have this new and right standing, this being justified through faith, through our new-found peace with God (Romans 5:1). Any professing Christian who claims to be “saved” is deceived if he or she has no appetite for the life-changing experience of the righteousness of God, which means a radically changed and constantly being-changed life. This imputed righteousness always is accompanied by imparted righteousness.

We are by God's saving grace his twice-born children, and because we have the presence of God in us we yearn for...

- *The righteousness of God*

When we receive a right standing with God and the presence of the forgiving, renewing God, we have a new hunger for the things of God and to live a life that pleases him. In the context of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, righteousness primarily means the 'doing of God's will from the heart' and a desire "to see justice done" (Carson, p.134). Thus, the righteousness for which we must hunger and thirst as much as a starving man wants food (Barclay, pp. 94f) is a yearning for our personal holiness and for the world to be made right with God. Jesus promises the blessings of God's satisfaction to those of us who yearn for God's righteousness...

- ✓ In our lives

Dallas Willard says, and I think rightly, that this Beatitude includes the kind of sinners that Jesus came to save, those of doubtful reputation. Thus, those who desperately hunger and thirst for righteousness include those who have "failed so badly that night and day they cringe before their own sin and inwardly scream to be made pure" (p. 117). And once we have come to repentance and faith and a life-changing relationship with Jesus as new creatures (2 Corinthians 5:17), we yearn to be totally transformed people, living to please God.

The life that pleases and honors God is one that seeks to love him entirely and to love others as ourselves. In other words, we want to seek to keep the first and the Greatest Commandment (22:34-40). We know we cannot, however, please God by our efforts to be good. This is the futile spiritual warfare Paul describes in Romans 7, wherein we fail to do what we know is right. Rather, the life of the disciple is one that pleases God through the power of the Holy Spirit, the life Paul describes in Romans 8 and also as walking in step with the Spirit and producing the fruit of the Spirit, as in Galatians 5:16-25.

We desire to live in a way that pleases God and that follows his perfect will for us. This is the life that has assurance that "in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). But those who hunger and thirst for righteousness also realize the truth of Romans 8:29, that God foreknew and has predestined us "to be conformed to the likeness of his Son." And our calling is to love him and follow his will in obedience to the Spirit and the Word of God. Those whom God blesses with deep and lasting satisfaction are those who long to honor and please God in their personal life but also who long for righteousness...

- ✓ In our world

Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are not satisfied with personal holiness, but also long to see the world put to rights. Those who will be blessed by God are those who share his desire for the earth's downtrodden who are now deprived of justice (Wilkins, p. 207).

Dallas Willard notes that this Beatitude may well include those who have been severely wronged and suffered terrible injustice, and who long to see their injury set right. He gives as an example, “the parents who learn that the murderer of their child has been quickly released from prison and is laughing at them” (p. 117). We think also of the families of those who are being persecuted and even martyred for their faith. When we hunger and thirst for righteousness we join them in longing for justice in the face of such satanic injustice.

Those who hunger and thirst for God’s justice to prevail will also pray and work toward a more just society. But also we are aware that perfect justice will never be achieved as long as sin and rebellion contaminate the human heart. This means that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are involved in the kingdom work of evangelism and mission, that people from every nation, people group, tribe and language will live under the perfectly just rule of God (Revelation 7:9). We know that there will be no perfect or complete justice on earth until human hearts are made right with God through faith in Jesus. In this Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says we are to “seek first his kingdom and his righteousness” (6:33). Those being made righteous as God is righteous desire the expansion and the consummation of his kingdom, and for his will to be done completely on earth as it is in heaven (6:10).

In response to this great, desperate hunger and thirst for God and his righteous rule Jesus gives...

➤ **God’s promise of satisfaction**

Peterson’s *The Message* paraphrases our text as: "You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God. He's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat." Jesus promises that those who hunger and thirst for God himself will be blessed with the singular joy that comes from a love relationship with him. This everlasting happiness and unbroken joy is...

- *Satisfaction from God*

I believe this deep satisfaction from God is that which Jesus promises to those who keep on asking, seeking and knocking. The Father longs to give us his “good gifts” (7:11), which Jesus equates with the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13). The Bread of Life is Jesus himself, who is our everlasting portion (John 6:53-58; Psalm 73:26). And he is the indwelling source of the Living Water of his Spirit (John 4:14; 7:37ff).

We will never find true and everlasting satisfaction outside of Jesus himself. One of the wealthiest men of his day, John D Rockefeller, when asked how much money it takes to satisfy, is reported to have replied, “A little bit more.” Satisfaction that is deep and lasting is to be found in a personal and growing relationship with the One who has made us for himself.

My wife brought home a favor from the ladies’ brunch yesterday, and a tag on this little sack of treats has the quote from Psalm 34:8,

“Taste and see that the Lord is good.”

Once we learn the joy of fellowship with Christ in a Spirit-filled and directed life, we will never be content again with anything less. I know that I, for one, have much to learn about making God the absolute portion of my life, who is the great delight of my life, like the best meal we could ever taste and yet also the One without whom we could not live.

Commenting on our text, John Piper quotes one of his favorite poems, *The Pulley*, by George Herbert (1593-1633):

*When God at first made man,
 Having a glass of blessings standing by—
Let us (said he) pour on him all we can;
 Let the world's riches which dispersed lie,
Contract into a span.
So strength first made a way;
 Then beauty flowed, then wisdom, honor, pleasure:
When almost all was out, God made a stay,
 Perceiving that, alone, of all His treasure,
Rest in the bottom lay.
For if I should (said He)
 Bestow this jewel also on My creature,
He would adore My gifts instead of Me,
 And rest in nature, not the God of Nature:
So both should losers be.
Yet let him keep the rest,
 But keep them with repining restlessness;
Let him be rich and weary, that at least
 If goodness lead him not, yet weariness
May toss him to My breast.*

God knows that, because of our fallen sin nature, we at times need “interruptions” in our lives that awaken us to our desperate need for God. And he uses adversity and disappointment to wean us from lesser pleasures and draw us to his breast. Because we naturally cling to the lower pleasures of this mortal life, often it takes, in the words of Larry Crabb, the shattering of our precious, even God-honoring dreams to drive us closer and deeper into the heart and love of God. Crabb makes a convincing point that not many Christians “drink deeply” of a love relationship with God, and only the “broken people” learn to worship God with a sense of total abandon to their dreams and lesser loves (pp. 53, 57, 92, etc.).

This 4th Beatitude shows a vital connection with the previous three. Those who find true satisfaction from God are the poor in spirit, realizing their poverty apart from God; are those who mourn with hearts broken over sin and suffering; and who are meek, humble and submissive before God, trusting him to do and to give

what is best. These first Beatitudes describe the person who hungers and thirsts for righteousness and holiness, which is found only in a relationship of walking with God, in step with the Spirit and in love with Jesus. Such blessed people who “go hard after God” (Piper) are those who have been weaned from worldly desires and ambitions.

This past week, as I read Mark’s account of Jesus’ miraculous feeding of the 5,000 (men, plus women and children), I was reminded that “They all ate and were satisfied, *and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish*” (6:42f). When we serve with Jesus, feeding his lambs (John 21:15), we too find great satisfaction.

The blessing of satisfaction from God is also the blessing of...

- *Satisfaction with God*

This Beatitude promises real and lasting satisfaction, and looks to a just social order that will finally and perfectly be “eschatologically achieved” only in the consummated Kingdom of God on earth (Nolland, p. 202). This blessing of satisfaction will be completely fulfilled with God in his heavenly rule on earth, when “the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9b). During our earthly pilgrimage, we cannot be completely satisfied, at least not to the degree that God has in mind for us. As CS Lewis said,

“If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world” (p. 120).

And so our hunger and thirst for righteousness is a harbinger of the life to come in the renewed heaven and earth. Our greatest hope is not what we shall have or even what we shall be in the consummated Kingdom, but rather, with whom we shall spend eternity—God himself. Our hearts will no longer be restless because we will have found the fullness of our rest in him.

Our yearning for personal righteousness and also for social justice and the salvation of all of God’s chosen ones will be fulfilled in the new age of the consummated Kingdom. And all of our troubling questions will be answered when we see Jesus and realize that all of our struggles and even the suffering that we endured in this life were not in vain. I like what Dallas Willard said about this Beatitude for those whose hearts are broken by injustice and the evil getting away, literally, with murder in this life: “The King of the heavens has a chemistry that can transform even the past and make the terrible, irretrievable losses that human beings experience seem insignificant in the greatness of God. He restores our soul and fills us with the goodness of rightness” (p. 117). This process of personal and social transformation begins in this life and surely will be completed in the age to come.

During the celebration in the streets of Chicago of the election of Barack Obama as the 44th President of the United States, the television camera focused on the face of Jesse Jackson, Sr., an influential civil rights leader and Baptist minister. The camera caught Jackson in a moment of inexpressible joy, as tears ran down his face during Obama's victory speech. Obama's victory was a great achievement for the advancement of civil rights in America, a cause for which Jackson has fought long and hard. His joy and satisfaction is only a faint adumbration of the joy, delight and satisfaction that God's people will experience when Jesus returns and sets everything to rights and our personal struggles for holiness and righteousness will finally be over.

Conclusion:

This Beatitude may be more likely to be reality for the new convert than for those of us who have been believers for a long time and have for many years eaten at the table of God's blessings.

When I was a growing boy, I had a ravenous appetite. Coming home from football practice, my mother would actually encourage me to eat a snack before mealtime so I wouldn't eat my and everyone else's portion at the dinner table. Thus she would invite me to eat a mound of peanut-butter filled crackers, washed down with a glass of milk. But for the normal eaters in our household, Mother would restrict eating a snack before dinner, lest they "spoil their appetite."

Maybe we have lost some of our appetite for righteousness because we have eaten too much junk between meals (in Dutch, "tussendoortjes"). It seems that the new convert, who has just received the free gift of eternal life and has discovered a life-changing relationship with God, has a great zeal for God and deep desire to please and serve him. What is it that happens to blunt our appetite for God's righteousness and to join him in his cause of making others and our world conform to his righteousness? As Kent Hughes reminds us, it seems that when we first come to faith in Jesus and into a personal relationship with God, we can't get enough of the Word and we're excited about living to please him and to grow deeper in our relationship with him (p. 41).

Perhaps today is a day to hear Christ's words to the Ephesian church and repent of our lost first love for Christ, our former hunger to know and love him in a deeper way (Revelation 2:4ff). As with the Laodicean church, Jesus knocks at the door of our hearts and wants to come in and share the meal of his loving fellowship with us (Revelation 3:20). I know that I am not capable of feeding Jesus' sheep in out of my own resources. I must first of all give priority to my own spiritual nourishment. I am nourished as I seek daily the Bread and Water of life for my thirsty soul by seeking after the righteousness and holiness that Jesus gives to all who ask him (Mark 11: 24).

We need to hear the invitation of a gracious God to all of us who are thirsty and hungry to,

“Come to the waters;
and you who have no money (who realize we cannot find satisfaction within
ourselves or the world),
come buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without cost.
Why spend money on what is not bread,
and your labor on what does not satisfy?
Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,
and your soul will delight in the riches of fare” (Isaiah 55:1f).

Lord Jesus, we want and we *need* to want you more than anything else, that we
might know your true and lasting satisfaction.

Thoughts and questions for personal reflection and/or group discussion:

1. Do you think that everyone, even the most secular and non-Christian, has a hunger to know God? What evidence can you give for this?
2. Why do you think that even some professing Christians have no appetite for spiritual matters?
3. In what ways are some professing Christians who attend church services seeking the wrong ways to satisfy their hunger or need for God?
4. What is your understanding of the righteousness that Jesus says we are to crave and seek after? Does your understanding include a social and missionary dimension as well as a desire for personal righteousness? Explain.
5. Do you agree that some Christians have become “samplers” of spiritual truth and are seeking satisfaction itself instead of the righteousness that results in satisfaction? Without mentioning names, give examples of those who are always “sampling,” and also of those who are bloating themselves on spiritual “junk food.”
6. Reflect on your experiences as a new believer. Is your spiritual appetite and desire to know and please God as great now as it was then?
7. Spend some time in prayer, renewing your commitment to hunger and thirst for personal and world-wide righteousness through the work of the Spirit in your life and the advancement of the gospel and civil justice, especially where fellow believers are suffering injustice.

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