

Be Attitudes: “Be Hungry and Thirsty”

Matthew 5:6 – May 30, 2010

Family meals, a very rare occasion for our family, have become even more unique because of the very healthy eating habits our children and their spouses have adopted. One is a vegetarian. Another is almost one. All four count calories and trans fats and portions. Even our three-month-old grandson, Jack, is very particular with his diet!

“Healthy choice” is now one of the top marketing slogans in the grocery store and the restaurant. It is a good thing that our eating habits have started to change toward the healthier. That has not been our culinary pattern since the days of Methuselah! The poet has spoken to this with his tongue in his cheek:

Methuselah ate what he found on his plate,
And never as people do now;
He took no account of the calorie count;
He ate it because it was chow.

He wasn't disturbed as at dinner he sat,
Devouring a roast or a pie
To think it was lacking in granular fat,
Or a couple of vitamins shy.

He cheerfully chewed every species of food,
Unmindful of troubles or fears
Lest his health might be hurt by some fancy dessert,
And he lived over nine hundred years.

Well, Methuselah was certainly the exception to the rule of “healthy choice!” And he was certainly the exception to the rule of a subsistence diet of most of the characters in the Bible.

Even into the twentieth century most of the inhabitants of Israel – the land ironically known as “flowing with milk and honey” – most survived on a very meager diet. Hunger was the norm. When Jesus needed to feed the five thousand it was not just because their mothers had not packed them a lunch, like the little boy's mother had! It was not only because their hunger and thirst for Jesus and his righteousness was even more powerful than their hunger for food. It was also because they didn't have anything to eat. That is the only miracle of Jesus that is recorded in all four gospels. Perhaps it is because it spoke to the pervasive hunger of the peasants he preached to.

Of course, water has always been a huge need in Israel. A big source of tension between Israel and its neighbors today is over who owns the water rights to the Jordan River. Much of Israel is a dry and barren land. The Hebrew word for “well” is “*beer*” as in “Beer-sheba,” and you find wells, springs, fountains and cisterns playing important parts in the biblical story. Stories are told of thirsting to death, of fights over wells and watering rights, of celebrations at the digging of a well or the discovery of a spring. Water had to be hauled from community wells. Peasant homes did not have their own water source.

Hungering and thirsting were a daily reality for first century Jewish peasants. These disciples and the crowd listening to the Sermon on the Mount knew intimately what Jesus was talking about! But most of us know very little about such hunger and thirst. Our problem is usually quite the opposite! That's where the “Healthy choice” slogan comes from!

A few years ago Morgan Spurlock made an award-winning independent documentary film on the fast-food industry. He was motivated by the fact that 37% of American children are overweight, and the Surgeon General had called obesity a national epidemic. Spurlock spent a month eating three meals a day at a particular fast-food chain. He only ate what was on the menu, nothing between – not even a Tic Tac. He ate every item on the menu at least once, including three salads.

In five days the athletic, thirty-three year old 6'2” 185 pound Spurlock gained ten pounds. At day 20 he went to his doctor with heart palpitations and was advised to stop his experiment. At day 30 he had gained 25 pounds, had fatigue, headaches, indigestion and depression. It took him 18 months to lose the weight. His conclusion: America's hungering and thirsting for fast-food is killing us! To their credit, the fast-food industry has responded by offering increasing numbers of “Healthy choice” items.

Our culture is addicted to fast food and, even worse, to junk food. Not just colas and fries and Twinkies! We take in all manner of spiritual toxins! Exploitive films, radio and TV shows that pander to our lower nature. Howard Stern, Jerry Springer, trash TV, shock jocks, unhealthy online chat rooms, provocative texting, the political rhetoric of hate, violence and uncivil discourse. “Unhealthy choices.” The revenues of the porn industry in our country are bigger than the revenues of the NFL, NBA and Major League Baseball combined!

As part of his fast-food research, Morgan Spurlock showed pictures of famous people to school children. Most recognized President Bush, who was serving then. All recognized Ronald McDonald. None recognized Jesus.

Augustine, the fourth century Christian convert, said it this way: “Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless, until it rest in Thee.” Blaise Pascal, the seventeenth century French convert, said it this way: “There is a God shaped vacuum in the heart of every man which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God, the Creator.” C.S. Lewis, the twentieth century British convert and Oxford don, said it this way: “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.”

The prophet Jeremiah said it this way: ¹ *For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water (ch. 12).* The prophet, Isaiah,

said it this way: ² *Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.* ³ *Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live (ch. 55).*

Lots of seekers have said it. Lots of hungry and thirsty souls who have not found it any other place but in God. But Jesus said it the best in this beatitude: *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.*

Biblical righteousness is not self-righteousness. It is God's righteousness. It *is* a private and personal affair, but it is more than that. It includes moral righteousness – eating and drinking from sources that build up our integrity instead of eroding it. It includes legal righteousness, being in a right relationship with the Holy One through the grace and mercy of Christ's sacrifice. And it includes social righteousness, seeing everything in life – in the home, on the job, in the culture, in the world – conform to what is right in God's plan.

Billy Graham has been a life long learner of the righteousness of God. Years ago, Ruth Bell almost returned his engagement ring when Billy the Baptist questioned her medical missionary father's spirituality because he was a Presbyterian! But narrow, young Billy was hungry and thirsty, and God has been filling him up ever since, and making him a bigger person. He grew to embrace Catholic and Orthodox Christians. He met with his critics and sought to learn from them. He did not target Jews or Muslims for direct evangelism. He received awards from Jewish groups. A few years ago he was quoted in Newsweek Magazine as saying: "There are many things that I don't understand. Sincere Christians can disagree about the details of scripture and theology – absolutely." He has said that if he could live his life over he would study more and preach less! Billy turns 92 this fall, and is still hungry and thirsty. And he has been incredibly blessed because of it, and so have we!

Blessed are those who, like Saint Billy, can grow in their faith! Blessed are those who passionately desire God! Blessed are those who earnestly pray and study the Bible and worship and serve! Blessed are those who make spiritually healthy choices to feed on! Blessed are those who crave the rightness of God in every area of life! Blessed are those who can say with Paul: *For me to live is Christ (Phil. 1:21)*. Blessed are those who will do what the rich young ruler would not do: Give it all up for the highest appetite of following Jesus! Blessed are those who are life long learners of the things of God!

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