

PASTOR DOUG'S FAVORITE BIBLE VERSES
Matthew 5:6

Last Sunday we began a lengthy series of sermons in which we are examining some of my favorite Bible verses. This issue of even having "favorite" Bible verses or "life verses" all began when I came to realize, as a 17 or 18 year old, that many more mature Christians seemed to have these verses...these favorite or even "life verses." And as I had come to embrace, early on in my spiritual pilgrimage, Romans 8:1 with its promise that "There is therefore now NO CONDEMNATION for those who are in Christ Jesus," it was **THAT verse** that I quickly latched on to as **my life verse**. And so I continued to look at Romans 8:1 as my life verse for many years...well into the years that I met Ruth, got married and even began to have children.

But then, one Sunday, we heard a fellow about my age give his testimony. This guy had gone to Lancaster Bible College, gotten married and then gone on to become a missionary to Mauritania. He was a really good guy and he had, from what I could understand, adopted Matthew 5:6 as **his** life verse. Let's turn to that verse...

Matthew 5:6

The King James Version read "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." And the NIV was pretty much the same.

But filled or satisfied, it didn't matter. I got the point: that there is a reward of sorts that God offers to those who really "hunger and thirst for righteousness." And when I read those words I thought, "That sounds like me!"

And so for the next 15 or so years I adopted Matthew 5:6 as my (new) life verse. I was still holding on to Romans 8:1, but if someone were to ask me what my life verse was I was now saying "Matthew 5:6."

So let's talk about Matthew 5:6 this morning...

The spiritual pilgrimage that I have been on, as with each of you, goes back to the earliest years of my life. Unlike some of you...maybe even most of you...I had two parents that strongly believed the Bible and its teaching about Jesus being "the way, the truth and the life." They believed and taught my sisters and me that without faith in Jesus, as OUR sin bearer, we were lost, condemned and certain to be lost for all eternity. I don't know about my sisters but my prayer, at age 4 or 5 to ask Jesus into my life, to take away my sin and to be my Savior was, I suppose, greatly prompted by a desire to not go to hell. If my Mommy and Daddy were going to heaven, then that is where I wanted to go as well.

But as I told you last week, it was when I was 17 – over the course of a single weekend in July of 1970 – that my relationship with God changed in a very dramatic way. And it all stemmed from my gaining a new understanding of the notion that Jesus died **NOT ONLY to be my Savior but also TO BE MY LORD**. And with that new understanding or realization, my life took a HUGE step in the direction of me having a real THIRST for the Word of God.

Matthew 4:1-4

Prior to this time in my life I believe I would have taken this statement in verse 4 to mean that for the Christian the Word of God is **very important**...that it matters to us...or some such idea. But after this

dramatic shift had occurred in me, I came to understand that the Word of God is what we need to LIVE...to BREATHE...to EXIST. That without it we will DIE!

It is not that the Bible is just **important** to us;

It is that the Bible is our LIFE! **Without it we're DEAD!**

Again,

- Before this change in my life I would have affirmed that the Bible is important, that it shows us the way to Christ, and that without it we would be woefully ignorant of the way of salvation (through faith in Christ).
- But after this change, my interest in the scriptures took a HUGE STEP FORWARD as I had come to realize that without God's revelation of himself in scripture I was doomed and damned! For the scriptures showed me JESUS. And Jesus was now my life...my "all in all" (as we often sing).

And so Matthew 5:6, it seemed to me, was an affirmation of what I had come to understand.

And then, along the way, I found another passage...

Matthew 11:1-12

Earlier in life I did not understand Matthew 11, verse 12, with its talk about the kingdom of heaven suffering violence or **the violent taking it by force**.

But then I came to understand that Jesus was here, in the context of talking about John the Baptist – who was hardly a "wallflower"...someone **passive** about his spiritual life – here Jesus was saying, "God's kingdom is made up of people like John. And while people like John can get into real trouble and even end up suffering for their faith, it is that same kind of person who is going to make it into the kingdom of God."

For the kingdom of God is not for the passive...the wallflower...the person who is just a "pew sitter." Rather the kingdom of heaven is for the "violent" – the outspoken, the spiritual mover and shaker, who is willing to **BREAK DOWN THE DOORS** of Heaven itself, if that is what is necessary to see God's kingdom and agenda advance.

I came to understand that Jesus isn't interested in having people who do nothing. They may be nice people, but he's not interested in "nice people."

Jesus is interested in people with GUTS and GUSTO and DRIVE.

And so, listen to me now, if the characterization of YOU is that you are passive, a drifter, someone without **DRIVE**, lacking an incredibly **DEEP DESIRE** for God and the things of God, I'm here to warn you, **there may not be a place for you in Christ's kingdom! (repeat)**

But you say, "Oh, but pastor, I prayed and asked Jesus to save me." And I would say, "That's good. But Jesus said "you will recognize them by their fruits." Tell me, what **FRUIT** or **FRUITS** do you have to show for your having asked Jesus to save you? If you asked Jesus to come into your life then the Spirit of Almighty God has been living in you. Rights? So, what has God done in you and through you?

For our God is looking for **FORCEFUL men and women** who having set their eyes on the Kingdom of God are not about to be dissuaded or pulled away in their pursuit of it.

Or how about this passage...

Matthew 22:34-40

This love for God and our neighbor is to be **ALL CONSUMING** in our life.

Our love for skiing, or

our love for a car, or

our love for a great round of golf on a beautiful day...

all of these "loves" **must take a backseat** to our love for God
and our love for others.

There is no compromising on this.

Or one last passage to drive home this main point...

Matthew 16:24-27

So when Jesus talked about "blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness" he was talking about those who WANT GOD...who WANT JESUS...who WANT WHAT GOD OFFERS **MORE than anything else.**

When I was 16 I don't think I understood that idea. But after that weekend in July of 1970, I got it. In the words of an old song, I could then sing the words,

Jesus is all the world to me

My life, my joy, my all.

He is my strength from day to day;

Without Him I would fall. (by C. Michael Hawn)

So I adopted Matthew 5:6 as my life verse. For it talked about what made me tick.

Now, Matthew 5:6 ends with a promise that for those who do hunger and thirst after righteousness, they will be filled or satisfied.

Many years ago, the wife of a man with whom I met for over a year, every Saturday morning, in small gratitude for me helping her husband come to Christ (which also resulted in the saving of their marriage) she offered me my choice of a number of antique lithograph prints of Bible verses. I chose Matthew 5:6. I have it here with me. But what always got me about this particular printing of Matthew 5:6 is that it looks like it reads, "*Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be BILLED!*" And I can certainly swear to the truthfulness of THAT STATEMENT!

But it is that they shall be **filled**...what other versions have translated as "satisfied."

It was about 10 years ago or so that our youngest son, Jonathan, announced near the end of the year that in the coming year he was not going to eat ANY CANDY. Believe it or not, back in those days our now VERY TRIM Jonathan was a bit on the pudgy side. And so the suggestion that he was not going to eat ANY CANDY for an entire year was both an incredible promise, but also one that we all thought would likely be good for him. After a couple of days of

thinking on his statement I announced that I wanted to support Jonathan in his venture for the coming year and that I too would not eat any candy. AND, in addition, that I would also not eat any cake, any cookies, any ice cream or drink any cola (meaning any soda). So, all these "C" words:

Candy
Cake
Cookies
ice Cream, and
Cola.

And so the new year commenced. I will tell you, there many days, particularly in the middle of summer, when I thought, "Man, I could go for an ice cold Coca-cola right about now." I came to be really glad that summer that orange juice didn't begin with the letter C. And how many times at a birthday party did I have to say "No thank you" to that offering of cake and ice cream? It was a tough year. But Jonathan made it ALL THE WAY...and so did I.

And so it was that on December 31st of that year, late at night, the two of us awaited for the hour to pass and the year to be done. And when it was clear that we were now into the new year one by one I took a piece of candy, or drank some soda, or had a piece of cake.

And do you know what I found? Every one of those things was VERY disappointing. I thought I would eat a piece of cake and it would seem like heaven to me, but it wasn't that way. Or that the cola that I had longed for SO MANY TIMES would prove to be wonderful. But it too was very disappointing. **Everything disappointed me...**except for one thing: ice cream. For when I took a spoonful of that IT **WAS HEAVENLY**.
HMMM. It tasted SO GOOD.

Well Jesus said that for those who hunger and thirst after righteousness there **is REAL SATISFACTION** coming their way...

Now **I am a Christian by conviction**. I have put my hand to the plow (Luke 9:62) and I'm not looking back. It is who I am. And nothing is going to change that. I will die a Christian. Indeed, as I have said through the years, I am looking forward to being able to quote Sir Henry Havelock, that mid-19th century British officer who, upon his deathbed, said to his son, "*Come, my son, and see how a Christian can die.*"

Yep, I'm looking forward to being able to quote Havelock from my own deathbed.

But **I am also a Christian because of SATISFACTION**. **I can sing** along with Bono and the U2 band as they sing, "But I still haven't found what I'm looking for" for I believe that my citizenship is ultimately in heaven and not here on earth. And that it is **only when I am united with Jesus** and the saints above that I will ultimately find and enjoy what I'm looking for.

But **I can't sing** with Mick Jagger and the Rolling Stones that "I can't get no... satisfaction." For I am a satisfied man. I'm a satisfied customer.

Jesus said to me, "Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

I found him to be a man of his word.
He was telling the truth.
And I'm satisfied.

How about you?
How about you?