



The Satisfaction of Hunger #2

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The Beatitudes are the starting point of the Sermon on the Mount, and the Sermon on the Mount is the starting point of Jesus' ministry as Matthew describes it for us in his gospel. We cannot over estimate the importance of having the right starting point.

When a ship sets sail, it needs to be on the exact right course. The smallest deviation from where the ship is supposed to be pointing will eventually take it far off course. The same thing could be said about an airplane taking off. If its direction is just slightly off kilter, ultimately it ends up at entirely the wrong place.

Our fundamental starting point is absolutely crucial to achieving the right result. I am afraid that far too many of you approach your Christian life from the wrong starting point. We need to get things on track with what we have to say today.

Much of living the Christian life can be reduced to going to the right starting point day after day and in everything that you do.

Wanting "good things" is not the fundamental starting point of your approach to the Christian life. It can't be. There is no way that that could be the right way to start.

The right question is not "What do I want in this situation?"

The right question is not "What do I want God to do?"

That is a fundamentally wrong approach to living your Christian life.

The right question, the one that will never lead you astray in terms of how you respond to life and how you address God in prayer, is not "what do I want," but "*How can I be righteous in this circumstance? How can I live righteously? What does God want from me in this circumstance?*"

Look at Matthew 5:6 which was our text last week and will be our text again this week.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

The starting point before God is for you to desire righteousness in your life. To do anything else is to put the cart before the horse.

Far too many of us want to be satisfied and comfortable without giving any regard to righteousness. If we can be satisfied, and incidentally also be righteous, we'd think that would be great.

That is the fundamentally wrong starting point.

You have to make your fundamental desire, your fundamental seeking, the continual thirst of your heart, to be for righteousness *regardless* of where that leads. That starting point will never lead you astray.

As we have said throughout this series, when Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount, He was defining the nature of repentance. In Matthew 4:17, Jesus says:

Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

The idea of repentance and “the kingdom of heaven is at hand” sets the stage for what Matthew lays out in the Sermon on the Mount. As Jesus gives the Sermon on the Mount, he is showing us what a life of repentance looks like.

We could say that to repent is to turn fundamentally away from sin and toward God in submission to Him through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Turning away from sin, turning toward God, and pursuing righteousness through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

As Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount, He is explaining what repentance looks like. We have said the Sermon on the Mount has two fundamental thrusts:

The Sermon on the Mount is a call to righteousness

The Sermon on the Mount fundamentally is a call to righteousness. Before you get tied up in the details of what it means to turn the other cheek or what Jesus is teaching on divorce, you have to understand that fundamentally He is calling His hearers to righteousness. A righteous life is a life of a dynamic character that reflects the character of God Himself.

Look at Matthew 6:33. Jesus said:

Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

The fundamental priority is to seek the kingdom of God, to seek righteousness. So the Sermon on the Mount calls us to that. And yet at the same time, the Sermon on the Mount is a call to blessing.

The Sermon on the Mount is a call to blessing

The call to righteousness does not come in an austere vacuum that is unrelated to what is good for you or what will bring joy to you. No. The Sermon on the Mount is a call to blessing. As we have been seeing in these Beatitudes in the first 10 verses of Matthew 5, Jesus over and over again pronounces blessing upon the people of this character. He promises untold blessing; rich, deep, profound goodness and blessing upon the people of the kingdom of heaven.

So while this Sermon defines a standard of righteousness and calls you to that which you do not possess on your own, makes you conscious of your unworthiness, and convicts you of sin; at the same time, it points you to the spiritual resources found at the right hand of God the Father and in His Son the Lord Jesus Christ.

Through its call to blessing, it attracts you to something better. It calls you up. It calls you to a place of deeper righteousness. So that is the framework in which the Sermon on the Mount operates.

This Sermon is not about how you can achieve righteousness in order to be saved. The Sermon on the Mount describes the life of someone who has been born into the kingdom of God. This is the life that should flow out of their heart and be present in their desires. People that have the character that is expressed in the Beatitudes are people who are blessed. God's favor rests upon them. God is favorably disposed toward them and because of that, we should desire to be like this. As you hear the Beatitudes taught and as you read the Beatitudes on your own during the week, you should be attracted and drawn to this lifestyle if you are a true child of God.

If you are not drawn to this, if this seems foreign to your experience and alien to your deepest desires, then you have a fundamental problem. You probably are not a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. The true child of God is drawn to this like steel is drawn to a magnet and says "Yes, this is what I want. Oh God, I fall short of this, I know. But God, if my truest heart desires be known, I do want to be one who is known as being poor in spirit. And it is just not that I want to be known that way, I truly want to *be* poor in spirit. I want to mourn over my sin because I hate it so much. I want to be one who is meek, who manifests spiritual composure in the face of difficult circumstances."

So this is just describing the life of someone who is truly born again. As I come to you as believers to lay these things out for you, God has already put in you the ability to be drawn to these things. We just have to recognize what He wants so we can orient our heart in that direction.

Now, what we have said throughout is that each of these Beatitudes leads logically to the next one. The man or the woman who recognizes that he or she is spiritually bankrupt as Jesus describes in Matthew 5:3, is someone who will mourn over their sins as described in Matthew 5:4.

You can't truly recognize how bankrupt you are before God without mourning over the fact that you are lost and you are not the person that you are supposed to be. You realize

that deep in your heart are things that should not be there. You mourn over that and you wish it were different, that this ugly, black thing called sin still attaches itself to you and you long to be rid of it and you are willing to fight the battle to see that happens.

When you do sin and you manifest a lack of righteousness in your life as you did at some point during this past week, you mourn over it, it grieves you that you have fallen short, that you have dishonored the God of your salvation. You dishonored the Lord Jesus Christ. That just grieves you and you come to God in brokenness and confess it and repent before Him.

That spirit leads to a person who is a man of meekness as we talked about a couple of weeks ago in 5:5. All of those principles lead to very naturally what we see expressed here in Matthew 5:6:

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Now, as we said last week (I'm starting to move beyond the review now), this is a very fascinating verse just from a teaching standpoint and the way that Jesus taught.

Jesus took ordinary words for bodily desires and bodily reactions; as He speaks here about "hunger and thirst." Those words are the typical words we would use to say, "I'm hungry," or "I'm thirsty." The word for satisfaction is the same word that is used almost exclusively elsewhere in the Scriptures to describe that feeling of fulfillment and satisfaction that comes from eating a good meal.

Jesus takes this familiar imagery from your human impulses in daily life and uses them to express a profound reality about unseen spiritual truth. The same sense of ongoing repeated hunger that you have for food and drink should be the same kind of thing that motivates your heart in your pursuit of righteousness. You never get enough. You are never satisfied in the sense that you are satisfied permanently and you never hunger again.

So our first point from last time :

1. A True Christian Desires Righteousness

This Beatitude pronounces blessedness upon the person who desires righteousness. God's favor rests upon someone whose heart is marked by a relentless desire to conform to His will.

So we quickly see (and this is probably one place where we can start to distinguish true and false repentance in our lives and in the lives of others), Jesus makes it really clear in the progression of these Beatitudes that it is not enough for you to feel bad about your sins. If your sense of mourning over sin and your sense of repentance only leads you to feeling bad about it and wishing may be that you hadn't done it, or regretting the

consequences of your sins, or regretting that they were found out, that is not true repentance.

The person that Jesus has described not only mourns over his sin in a negative sense. There is a positive desire for righteousness that starts to well up in his heart. It is not enough for me, “Oh, I wish I hadn’t done that.” No. Real repentance says, “I wish I hadn’t done that. *Now* what must I do in order to please God?” That positive desire becomes the true mark of righteousness.

You positively want to be like Christ in your attitudes, your words and your actions. It is that desire for righteousness, actually living out things that positively please God, not simply mourning over the places that you failed. That is what Jesus means here by hungering and thirsting for righteousness.

Let me give you again the simple definition that I gave you last week. Hungering and thirsting over righteousness is the negative desire to avoid sin in every form and the positive desire to live out practical righteousness in every day life.

This is immensely practical. Jesus lays out things that are immensely practical in day-to-day life. This is not some kind of vague spiritual teaching with no connection to real life. This impacts everything. This insistence on practical righteousness—what we would call the outworking of sanctification, to use theological terms for a moment—this is what Jesus is insisting on throughout the Sermon on the Mount.

Not only is it found in 5:6, but look at Matthew 6:10, where this desire for righteousness is expressed in Jesus’ model prayer. Notice verse 9:

*Our Father who is in heaven,
Hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.*

That desire for righteousness expresses itself in your prayer life by saying, “God whatever else you do, you make sure that your will is done.” Put a check mark in your mind on the way that you pray, because that is important for testing our hearts in this matter. You pray that God’s will would be done.

In 6:33 He says, “Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness.” In 7:21, Jesus says:

Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.

So in these highlights you see this emphasis on seeking the will of God, seeking His righteousness, doing the will of God the Father. Jesus throughout this Sermon is talking about the practical righteousness of living out your status as a child of God in daily life.

A preoccupation with God's standard of righteousness is the driving force of the heart of the believer. It is fair to say that the whole Sermon is oriented toward this theme of righteous living. The pursuit of righteousness should be the first priority of your heart and your first priority in prayer.

This is really clear. I haven't told you anything you couldn't read for yourself in the text. And yet, I fear that we stray at this very fundamental point and at very fundamental levels. Jesus said what we speak reflects what is in our hearts. If we are to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and that is really dominating our thinking and our motivations and we are just consumed with that, then our thought in every relationship, every circumstance, every conversation, every prayer should somehow radiate around the axis of "How can I be righteous here? What does God's will require from me here?"

It starts with that kind of heart attitude that is proactively concerned about the righteousness of God and conforming myself to it. If we express our truest desires when we pray alone to God, then what is coming out of your mouth when you are on your knees before God is expressed in what you most truly desire and what you most deeply want.

If this hunger and thirst for righteousness truly dominated our hearts, then that would be reflected in the conversations we have and the way we pray—not only when we are alone with God but the way we pray with one another.

What I am about to say has smote my own conscience. If you listen to us talk and pray, if you listen to our prayer requests (even though they are good and important prayer requests), how often do you hear the theme, "We have got to pursue the righteousness of God in this?"

When you pray, how often are you less concerned about your circumstances and simply beg God to help you be righteous in your life? When do you pray, "Lord, help me express your righteousness in these difficult circumstances? What should I say that would be righteous in this situation?"

If the first priority is to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, then that should be dominating the way that we pray and the way we interact with each other as believers.

I'll leave it for you to decide for your own conscience whether that is true of you or not. If it is not, we have to realize that approaching spiritual life in entirely the wrong manner. Something is seriously wrong when someone names the name of Christ and yet the pursuit of God's righteousness is so lacking in our prayer and in our fellowship with one another.

That should shake us up. It is not enough to be at even a Bible-teaching church on Sunday. Where has your pursuit of righteousness actually and tangibly expressed itself?

When you pray, your first words should not be, “God, do this. God, bless that,” as if you were the supervisor and the Lord of the universe was somehow your summer intern to order around for the fulfillment of your personal desires.

No, no, no! That’s the wrong approach. If you are truly hungering and thirsting for righteousness like a starving man craves for food and drink, your prayer life is going to reflect that. Your prayer life will center on the theme of, “Lord, conform me to your will. Help me recognize and practice righteousness in this situation regardless of what it means for me. God, let me not dictate to *you* what I think you ought to *do* in this circumstance. You dictate to *me* what I ought to *be*.”

That kind of prayer and attitude will drive you back to the Word of God and say, “God, how would you have me deal with my difficult spouse? How would you have me deal with that difficult person in the workplace? How would you have me speak?”

The person who is hungering and thirsting for righteousness understands he is not the center of the universe. He no longer prays with the desire to use God to achieve his personal, earthly ends.

To the contrary, the true Christian who is broken in spirit and mourning over sin says, “God, what do you want from me? Let me go back to your word. Illuminate my understanding so that I can understand. God, I will obey. I just want to be righteous before you, Lord, whether I get another paycheck or not. God, I must be righteous here.”

When does your prayer life approximate that, beloved? “I’ll get around do it on Wednesday, pastor.” Let’s forget that. Don’t let yourself off so easily.

When you take to heart what Jesus says here, you realize that your prayer life and your conversations are a window into your soul. If you are really hungering and thirsting after righteousness, your life will reflect it. You can’t help it. It pours out because the mouth speaks from that which fills the heart (cf. Matthew 12:34-35). So the absence of that dominating passion in your prayer and the absence of that dominating passion in your conversations reflects a serious and sobering deficiency in your spiritual life.

When your fundamental starting point in life is the pursuit of righteousness, life becomes about God changing you rather than God changing your circumstances. You no longer presuppose that another person is the problem or that your circumstances have to change.

No. You are the one who needs to change. You need God to work out practical righteousness in your heart so that it flows out of your life. Just like a starving man cares about nothing else but getting food, your dominating passion is “God, I have got to live righteously. I have to live out the grandeur of this salvation which you have given me in Jesus Christ. God, I want *that* even if nothing changes.”

To illustrate this, I was drawn to Solomon’s prayer back in 1 Kings 3. It is always tricky to hold up Solomon as a model of righteousness in light of the way his life turned out.

But here he illustrates the kind of mind set that God wants from us in life. You seek righteousness as your first priority then let other things come as they may. That is what Solomon did in 1 Kings 3.

Solomon had just ascended to the throne and in 1 Kings 3:5, the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream and said, “Ask what you wish me to give you.”

Every time you go to prayer, in essence that’s what’s happening. God says, “What is it that you wish me to give you?” What you say in response tells you where your heart is at.

Solomon says in verse 6:

You have shown great lovingkindness to Your servant David my father, according as he walked before You in truth and righteousness and uprightness of heart toward You; and You have reserved for him this great lovingkindness, that You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. Now, O Lord my God, You have made Your servant king in place of my father David, yet I am but a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. Your servant is in the midst of Your people which You have chosen, a great people who are too many to be numbered or counted. So give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?

God’s commentary on Solomon’s prayer follows in verse 10:

It was pleasing in the sight of the Lord that Solomon had asked this thing. God said to him, “Because you have asked this thing and have not asked for yourself long life, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have you asked for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself discernment to understand justice, behold, I have done according to your words. Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you. I have also given you what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that there will not be any among the kings like you all your days.”

God says in response to Solomon’s prayer, *that’s* what I want.

We could say that Solomon was seeking righteousness. He was seeking a discerning heart to be the king God wanted him to be. He saw his sense of responsibility before the throne of God and he says, “God, what I really want is to be what you want me to be.”

That’s the sense in which we pray.

God gave what Solomon requested, and then in His matchless goodness, God gave him everything else that he could have asked for but didn’t. Solomon in essence was saying,

“God, I want to be your righteous king. That’s my prayer. All other matters about my comfort and happiness are secondary.” Solomon had his priorities right.

Beloved, while you are not a king, Solomon’s prayer is the way you need to pray. You so hunger and thirst for righteousness that in every discussion, every decision, every time the phone rings, your prayer would be, “God, let me be righteous in this decision. Let me be righteous in this discussion. Whatever else comes, let me express the outworking of practical righteousness in my life. And if anything else comes up that you want to do, that’s okay too. Amen.”

This hunger and thirst for righteousness that Jesus describes motivates all of your life. It must anchor the way in which you approach everything. It is not a sideline to your pursuit of your other endeavors. You don’t ask God to baptize your desires with His will, but rather you say, “God, Your will is first. Express that through me.”

Now, the beauty of it is that God is no man’s debtor. He blessed Solomon beyond what he asked. You see the same principle here in Matthew 5:6. This leads us to our second point. The first point was that the true Christian desires righteousness. Now we see:

2. The True Christian’s Hunger for Righteousness Will Be Satisfied

That desire for righteousness will be satisfied when you pursue God in this way. So when I stand up here as a pastor and exhort you to live this out, I just desire the blessing of God in your life. Do you understand that? I want you to experience the richness of what Jesus promises here in Matthew 5:6. Look at the text with me again.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Jesus’ statement here, just like all the other ones in the Beatitudes, is exclusive. He says that these people—the ones who hunger and thirst for righteousness—these people *and these people alone* will be satisfied.

Those who pursue anything besides righteousness will not know satisfaction. They will not know fulfillment. They will not be members of the kingdom. They will be left outside looking in because people who disregard righteousness do not belong to the kingdom of heaven. You can’t just pay lip service to it. This goes to the fundamental hungers and thirsts and desires that dominate all of your life.

Now, the word Jesus uses here for “satisfied” usually describes the feeling of fulfillment that comes after eating a meal. It is almost exclusively used that way in the Scriptures except for this Beatitude. For example, when Jesus fed the five thousand with a few loaves and couple of fish, the Bible says that all the people there they “ate and were *satisfied*” (Matthew 14:20). They were hungry because they hadn’t eaten. But when Jesus fed them with the loaves and the fish, they were satisfied.

Get this. Their desire was quenched. The hunger had yielded to a sense of fullness and contentment. Your physical hunger yields to a sense of satisfaction that say, “Man, that was *good!*”

That is the sense of spiritual satisfaction that comes when a mourning sinner, conscious of his spiritual bankruptcy, has when he comes to Christ for salvation. Knowing his complete lack, he “eats” in Christ says, “Ah, there is my righteousness. I cling to Him, not my own righteousness.” So the spiritual bankruptcy and mourning over sin of Matthew 5:3-4 drives us to Christ and His perfect righteousness where we find satisfaction before the holy demands of God’s law. That is all we need to have a right standing before God.

We find no lack in Christ because He is perfect, and thus we are satisfied in Him. Your longings for righteousness are filled in Christ and in Christ alone, not in your circumstances, not in anything else. 1 Corinthians 1:30-31 says:

By His doing, you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, ‘Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.’

Christ is our righteousness. Christ is our sanctification. The fulfillment of your desires for righteousness is found in the person of Jesus Christ. When you realize that God has credited that perfect righteousness of Christ to your account, you have an anchor for your thirsty soul to draw upon.

This is where my righteousness is found. It is in Christ and in Christ alone in an ultimate perfect sense. It is the sense in which Jesus told the Samaritan woman:

Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life (John 4:14).

God satisfies the thirsty soul and we are satisfied in Christ. We are presently satisfied with Christ in a positional sense.

And yet, this Beatitude describes an ongoing hungering and thirsting even as present citizens of the kingdom of heaven. If we’re honest, we know that experientially. As we live out our Christian faith here on earth, we recognize a lingering sense of spiritual dissatisfaction. How can we be in an all-sufficient Christ and yet still have a sense of spiritual dissatisfaction?

As we live the Christian life, we still “hunger and thirst” because our salvation is not yet fully realized. We still struggle with the world, the devil and with our own flesh (cf. 1 John 2:15-17). While we realize that Christ and His righteousness are perfect, our personal experience is still imperfect because of the remaining sin within us and the hostile spiritual environment in which we live. We groan over sin while we wait for the

redemption of our bodies. Until we get to heaven, the fullness of our salvation is not yet our full possession (cf. Romans 8:23-25).

If you find a lack in yourself and desire to increase in your Christian experience, that's the hunger and thirst. It is not that you need more of Christ or He needs to be more perfect. No. It is that your experience of your salvation is imperfect in this life and won't be perfected until you are with Christ in heaven.

That's what the apostle Paul was saying in Philippians 3:12:

Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.

Paul knew the perfect righteousness of Christ. He knew better than anyone the significance of union with Christ. And yet even in that experience and with that understanding, he says, "There is still a sense in which I am pressing on. I want to lay hold of more."

He was satisfied in Christ and yet he was still hungering. That is always the tension in which you as a believer in Christ live here on earth.

But praise God for it, because that sense of hunger motivates you to seek further spiritual growth. It motivates you to know Christ more deeply, to love Him more fully. That hunger urges you on. Those spiritual desires urge you on to a greater and deeper and broader relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Beloved, the more you desire this righteousness, the more you will seek it and the greater your spiritual progress will be. You can never have enough of God and His righteousness. You can never dwell on it enough. You know more is available than you have experienced to date and you desire to know it all still more.

So are you hungry? Are you thirsty? These Beatitudes really challenge the very depths of our souls. You say, "Yes, I desire it." Praise the Lord for that. How does that express itself when you pray? Those are the questions that we have to wrestle with and come to grips with and purify ourselves with.

The Lord convicts us of these things not to condemn us but to change us and to make us more like what He wants us to be.

One final point that we should say about the satisfaction. Presently we are satisfied with Christ. We couldn't add to His perfection. He is perfect. He is God, He is king, He is my high priest, He is my Lord, He is my savior, He is my friend, He is my comforter, He is my counselor, He is the eternal Father; there is no lack in Him. Plenty of lack in me, but no lack in Him.

But ultimately, our ultimate satisfaction is still future, and that is included in what Christ said here in Matthew 5:6.

Ultimately, there will be eternal satisfaction. When we are with Christ, when we sit down with Him in His kingdom, then there will be a perfect satisfaction. There will be no more hunger and no more thirsting because faith will have become sight. We will be made like him for we will see Him as He is.

Then, and only then, sin and opposition will cease. All the enemies of our soul will be vanquished. We will see Him and be like Him. That will never change. When we sit down at that great banquet with our Lord and King, we will be fully, completely and eternally satisfied. Nothing will ever intrude or ruin that perfection. Nothing. That glorious destiny belongs to us as citizens of the kingdom.

Do you know that hope? Do you know this Christ? If Jesus' teaching provokes questions in your mind, you need to go to Christ and seek Him. The one who puts his faith in Christ starts on a pattern of life that lives out what we are describing here.

For those of you that know Christ, take stock of your heart and say, "Where do I pursue righteousness? How does the thirst for righteousness express itself in my life?"

Be honest and pursue it with the hope and certainty that God will fulfill His promise that you will be satisfied. The life of a Christian is never in vain.

Let's pray together, shall we?

Father, it will be a glorious day when our hunger is fully satisfied, when we sit at table with Jesus and we drink the fruit of the vine anew with Him in your kingdom. We long for that day, Father, and we can't wait for its fulfillment.

And yet at the same time, Father, we are satisfied with Christ right now. We are so glad, so grateful, so thankful for what you have done in our lives as believers and it would be our desire and our prayer to seek the outworking of that righteousness in every conversation and every circumstance that we face this week, Lord. Father, we would align our hearts with yours. We would seek first your kingdom and your righteousness. Let that be true in every one of us.

And as we pursue that, Father, we would just pray and trust you for the fulfillment and the satisfaction of those desires in your time and in your way. We seek not a change in other people or a change in our surroundings, Father. We seek your righteousness. We seek you to change us and to conform us to your will.

Father, let us see the fruit of that coming out as we speak and as we pray so that what comes out of our mouths would reflect what was in our hearts: a true, deep, profound, abiding hunger to be a people who live out the righteousness that Jesus describes in the Sermon on the Mount.

We bless your name. We thank you for the Christ who came, was crucified and raised again for our justification for therein, Father lies the starting point, therein lies the fountain from all these blessings flow.

We commit it to you, to your glory and to the glory of Christ.

Amen.

This transcript was prepared by Shari Main.