

Longing for Righteousness

The Beatitudes

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In life as well as in biblical interpretation, context is everything. The surrounding principles that we take to understand Scripture are essential in understanding an individual text or understanding the nature of what Jesus might be saying at any given time in his word, and I want to start with a little bit of context that I think will be important for you as we open up God's word again this morning. We're going to go to Matthew 5 but first I want you to turn to the book of Ephesians for a little bit of context to establish the meaning of what Jesus is going to be telling us in the Sermon on the Mount as we turn to that text in just a moment. Back in the day, we studied Ephesians verse-by-verse and went through all six chapters of it and I want to remind you by way of context what we saw in Ephesians 2, verse 1. The biblical teaching is that men are dead in sin and that is essential to understand. It's a very important starting point as you come to consider the whole meaning of salvation, the whole doctrine of salvation, what does it mean to be a Christian. You must start from the context of where you came from, where it all began, and spiritually speaking in the course of your life, it began with you being dead in sin.

Look at Ephesians 2:1, "you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest." The starting point in spiritual life was for you spiritual death; that you were animated by unspiritual desires; that you had no life of God within you, there was no spark of divinity whatsoever in your soul. You were dead, the lights were out, it was dark and you were under the domination of the devil, and in that condition you were doomed to suffer the wrath of God, and that is the condition for all of you that are not in Christ here this morning, that there is no spiritual life in you and you are in a desperately bad spiritual position. That's the starting point. Left on your own, you are a lost sinner without any hope of heaven and the only way that you can be reconciled to God is through faith in Christ. This is the whole meaning of redemption, that Christ came into the world in order to save sinners just like you, not to call them to work up their own salvation by trying harder in their deeds, but to do what you could not do for yourself and that is Christ offered his own blood as the sacrifice which would reconcile you to God. You are reconciled to God, you approach God, you

come to God only through the merit and shed blood of someone else. There is nothing in you that could have saved yourself. You would not even have ever desired it if God had not first done a work in your heart.

So that's how dead you were. That's how desperate your situation was. Scripture says that God "made Christ who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." God receives sinful men just like you, simple women just like you, not by looking at their deeds and saying, "That's good enough for me," God receives sinful men by declaring them righteous when they put their faith in Christ. You approach God on the merits of someone else, not on your own. That is essential for you to understand. If you do not understand that, if you do not trust in Christ, you are not a Christian no matter how religious you may be. It's very essential for you to understand that and grasp that because it is the core of biblical teaching about salvation. It is not by works that you have done that any of us come to Christ. Look down at Ephesians 2:8, "For it is by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." So you see it all right there, not by works, not by anything you have done, not on anything that you could boast in. It's not even that you had the initial impulse that took you to Christ and therefore somehow distinguished you from someone else. It was because God graciously did a work in your heart to awaken you to your lost condition to bring you to the point where you would cry out to Christ for salvation. Totally a work of God. Totally grace. Totally on the merits of someone else. And that is the only way that anyone enters into the kingdom of God.

Now, salvation thus is a gift of God and this is, you know, we've been describing and talking about the declaration of righteousness on which God saves someone, we've been talking about describing the effects of and the basis of the doctrine of biblical justification in what we just said. Now, that's the context of what we're going into today. You need to keep that all firmly in mind so that you don't go astray. Salvation is not only a legal declaration that God accepts you as righteous based on the merits of Christ, when you were saved, at the moment of your conversion, God did something supernatural in your heart. When God saves a man, he not only justifies them, he also regenerates them. He gives them new life. He imparts a new nature to them that changes their inner man, gives them new affections, gives them new desires, changes them into somebody new and saved you and changed you in such a way that you – watch this, this is really key, this is a key pivot point in the message now – that you would desire new things flowing out of the reality of the work of God that he has done in your heart.

Look at Ephesians 2:10. You see, it's not just that God declares you righteous and leaves you unchanged in your inner man, there is a change that takes place inside you. Verse 10, "we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." You see, it's a total fallacy and I was raised on this fallacy in the churches that I attended as a young boy, raised on this fallacy that you could just pray a prayer and God would save you and then you'd just go on with your life and nothing changes and the fact that your life never changed and was sinful and unrighteous did nothing to call into question about whether you were really saved or not.

Hopefully, I trust that those of you that attend our church realize that that's not true. It's not that the works that we do provide any merit upon which God would accept us, it's the fact that God changes a man when he truly saves him and a new life flows out of that. To be in the kingdom of God, to be saved by the blood of Christ, is to be a new man. "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature. Behold the old things have passed away, behold new things have come," 2 Corinthians 5:17. So as you look at a man's life, as you look at your own life, you look for the presence of desires, of affections, of priorities that are different from what you used to be; that are alien to the world environment in which you live; hungers and thirsts for righteousness, for pleasing God, for loving Christ that were never there before. That's the central mark of someone who has been born again.

Look over at Titus 2 and soon we will pivot into our text for this morning, but Titus 2. All of this is context to prepare you to see where what we're going to look at from the Sermon on the Mount fits into the reality of salvation. Titus 2:14 says that Christ Jesus gave himself for us, to redeem us from every lawless deed, gave himself on the cross for our salvation, gave over his human body, his perfect soul, gave it over on the cross to be the sin sacrifice alone that God would except for sinners like you and me. He "gave Himself to redeem us," to buy us out, "from every lawless deed," to buy us out for that miserable condition and nature of sin that you were once dead in, "and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession." Look at Titus 2:14, look at this, look at this final clause, it's about to be here, "zealous for good deeds." That Christ saves people, he saved you if you're a Christian here today, he saved you in part that you would have a zeal for his kingdom, to live righteously in a way that he calls you to in the Scripture, to love him, to respond to him, to gladly be under his authority and to respond to the dictates of his word, and that that desire is one of the preeminent purposes of your salvation. Christ redeemed you not only to keep you out of hell, Christ redeemed you, saved you to change you, that there would be an inner principle of zeal for godliness in your heart and absent that zeal for godliness, a man has never been born again no matter what else he may say with his lips. James said that even the demons believe and they tremble, you know, and so you can't go simply by what a man says with his lips and you shouldn't go simply by things that you believe with your head. You need to ask yourself, "What's in my heart? Is there a desire? Is there a longing for Christ, a longing for his righteousness, a longing that my life would please him, that my life would glorify him, that my heart would be devoted as a temple, as it were, for his glory?" That's what true salvation produces. It produces disciples who love Christ and have an honoring desire to please him. Is that where your heart is at this morning as we gather together? That's the question because true salvation brings new affections in the heart and Jesus is speaking of that today.

Now finally, we turn to Matthew 5 and I invite you to turn to Matthew 5 where we will be spending most of the rest of our time here today. Matthew 5. We have begun what will be a several month study of the Sermon on the Mount and I'm very delighted for us to be here and the Sermon on the Mount opens with a section that is known as the Beatitudes, Matthew 5:3 through 10, and let's just read the first four verses to set again the context for what we're going to see in verse 6. Jesus "opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying," in verse 3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth." And today's text,

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

Jesus here is describing what life in his kingdom looks like, what the inner person is like of someone who has truly been born again. Someone who has been born into God's kingdom, what does his life look like? What kind of man is this? What does true repentance produce? What does salvation look like? Well, you find in the Sermon on the Mount, you see a great exposition from Jesus of what repentance produces. You could say in the language of Titus 2:14, you get a sense of what this zeal for good deeds looks like. What is this life like? It is totally foreign, totally alien to anything in the world. There is no philosophy that teaches this. There is no human philosophy that exhorts men to go in this direction. This is one of the ways that we know that Christianity is supernatural, beyond men, because it calls them to affections that are absolutely alien and hostile to the natural man.

So Jesus, as Matthew presents his Gospel, he places this sermon at the very start of Matthew's Gospel to say this is what life in the kingdom looks like. And what is it like? It's found in a man who recognizes that he has no merit before God, he is poor in spirit. It's a man who is not boastful, proud and arrogant, but rather who mourns over his sin. Recognizing his sin, he says, "I regret the kind of man that I am. I regret that I fall short of the glory of God. It gives me sorrow to realize who I am, the magnificence of God, the magnificence of Christ, the glory of what life should be and to find that I am a measly sinner in light of the word of God." This is the heart of somebody who belongs to the kingdom and last time in verse 5 we saw what that produces, "Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth," we said that that describes a spiritual composure that is rooted in the trust of God; that responds peaceably to difficult people and to difficult circumstances. You see, when your heart has been broken over your own sin, when you realize that you are the one who is guilty in the presence of God, when you realize that you have been on the receiving end of great mercy, it humbles you. Beloved, it does this: it softens your heart in a way that makes you teachable under the word of God and gives you a disposition toward peaceableness with men. This is what true salvation produces.

Now notice, kind of filling out the context that we started this message with, Jesus here is not calling people to an effort of good works that would earn salvation. That needs to be said multiple times because you're all so prone in the sinfulness of your heart to think and to flatter yourself that you can do things that are good enough to earn God's pleasure. You can't. That window has been shattered. It can't be replaced. That pane of glass has been broken and the pieces can't be put back together again and so you have to come to God on his terms and realize that you come to him as one who is beggarly in spirit, one in need of grace, not one presenting the filthy rags of your righteousness and saying, "God, reward me for this." This is a completely distinct view of salvation that Jesus says. So Jesus is starting out describing someone who is mourning over sin, someone who recognizes his spiritual bankruptcy. That's the starting point so that, finally, get to that

purpose clause, so that when Jesus says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness," you realize that this verse, Matthew 5:6, is not saying, "Here is what you must do in order to be saved, and you must produce this righteousness on your own." Rather he's talking about that other side. He's talking about the life that flows from regeneration, the life that flows from true salvation. What does being born into the kingdom of God produce in your heart, that's what he's talking about here in Matthew 5:6 and let's just make this really really simple: a truly saved man or woman or young person, a truly saved person will desire the things of God. Period.

Now when you think about it, that's so obvious, that's so simple that it's remarkable that entire segments of the professing church have missed it and have promised and assured people of salvation who have no interest in the things of God whatsoever. A Catholic priest stands up and pronounces forgiveness of sin on people and they go out and they have not even any interest in the ritual itself, let alone a life that would hunger after the biblical things of righteousness. Whole segments of people in the world have walked an aisle, raised a hand, prayed a prayer, been pronounced Christians, and that pronouncement has never been questioned even though they go through year after year, decade after decade of their lives in drunkenness and adultery and lust and infidelity to their family and their salvation is never questioned, and you go to their funeral and someone stands up, a preacher will stand up and say, "I was with him when he was 10 years old and he prayed to receive Jesus and now he's in heaven." Well, this is an utter treacherous, treasonous betrayal of scriptural principles to communicate that to people. A true person, a true Christian, someone who has genuinely been saved, has a heart that has been transformed. If a holy God has saved you and a Holy Spirit dwells within you and God has given you a new nature that is like after his, isn't it obvious that someone who is in that blessed spiritual position is going to have impulses, affections, desires, priorities in his life that reflect the kingdom of the one who saved him? Could anything be more obvious than that? How did we ever get to a position where people could be declared Christians who have no desire for Christ? That's crazy. That's insanity. That leads people to hell to affirm them in such things.

Well, Jesus here as he describes what life in the kingdom is like, shows us in verse 6 something really critical. Let's look at verse 6 again. We'll read it on its own and then we'll go into a two-part message here this morning. Jesus says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." I'm going to break this message down into two parts. First of all, the hunger for righteousness. I want to describe this hunger of which Jesus speaks, and not just of which he speaks but that which he pronounces blessing on. He says, "Here's a person that God has bestowed his favor on. Here is someone that God has blessed. Here is someone who is privileged in the sight of God to have desires like this." Well, as we look at the full teaching of Scripture on salvation, we see that this is the mark of somebody who has been born again. Jesus said in John 3, "Unless you're born again, you cannot see the kingdom of God." Well, now he's talking about someone who has been born again, someone who is in the kingdom, what does their life look like, and he is describing that and in verse 6 he says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness."

Now, watch this, Jesus is teaching and the simplicity of his teaching is remarkable. He takes words that you and I and the youngest child that is with us here today can understand. He uses the same terms that are used to describe the physical desires of hunger and thirst. These same words are used to describe the bodily desires that you and I understand and experience, and he takes that which we understand in the physical realm, lifts it up and places it in a spiritual realm and says, "Let me talk to you about something different"; he takes that which is familiar and leads us into that which he would have us to understand. So he's teaching truth about the spiritual realm and what he's saying is this, "You know what it's like, your appetite engages and you are hungry and you want something and your body continues to urge you until you satisfy that desire." There's nothing wrong with that that's just part of being in humanity. Well, what Jesus is saying is that in the spiritual realm, there is a hunger, there is a thirst, there is a yearning, there is a desire that is repetitive, that is ever present while you have breath and that desire is for holiness, for righteousness, that your life would conform to the nature of the one who saved you. Holiness is the great longing for the one who has been saved by a holy God. You aspire after. I'm using all kinds of different synonyms, different verbs and adjectives and nouns all making the same single point. You desire after, you aspire after, you long for the kind of character that is perfectly reflected in the one who saved you. You want to be like Christ.

So this desire for righteousness, you could say it in the simplest terms, it's a desire to avoid sin and to live righteously. It's a desire that says, "I don't want to do things that displease God, rather my desire is to please my Savior with my life. You know, I remember, I can't ever get it out of my mind," you say to yourself, "I remember that he went to Calvary and suffered and bled and died and was raised from the dead in order to purchase my salvation, and he did that as a free act of grace to me and graciously invited me into his kingdom, graciously invited me into his family, brought me by his power into his realm when I didn't deserve that when he had the right to judge me. Instead he showed favor to me, grace to me." And the redeemed heart says, "Do you know what? I love him for that. I love the man, I love the God incarnate who did that for me and therefore I want to please him. I find his character, his attributes pleasing in my sight. They are attractive. They are winsome to me. This is desirable." And so my heart and life move in that direction, finding all of that, of course, revealed in God's word. So this one who hungers and thirsts for righteousness is someone who belongs to the kingdom and wants to live like it, wants to conform his life to it.

Now, think about, we'll go back and forth between the bodily and the spiritual realms here, think about the nature of your physical hunger, physical thirst. It comes and there is a sense in which it stays with you throughout life, doesn't it? That appetite is never fully extinguished in this life as long as you're living and somewhat healthy. That hunger, you eat and you're satisfied but a little time goes by and it comes back again and there is that underlying current of appetite that drives you to the physical sustenance you need to keep your body operating properly; there is a power within you, an appetite, that continues on and on. Well, in the spiritual realm, it's the same way. A man who is truly born again has this ongoing desire, this continual impulse in his heart that never is extinguished, that wants to be like Christ, that desires this kind of righteousness. This is the hunger and

thirst of which Christ is speaking, that this matter is, that this is important. So just as the principles of hunger and thirst stay with you throughout your natural life, so in the same way the desire for godliness marks the life of the one who has been born again.

Do you have that in your heart? That's the question. That's the symptom. That's the evidence of the unseen spiritual reality that you can't put your finger on. The work of regeneration, the work of salvation is an invisible work in the inner man that cannot be manifested by rituals or by anything that you do, in one sense. The initial recognizing factor that you find in true salvation is new desires, desires that are after God's word, after God's Son, after God's righteousness. The question is: do you have that in your heart? If you do, Jesus says you're blessed. You belong to the kingdom. It's going to be well for you in the end. If you say, "I have no idea what you're talking about," or you say, "I've heard this all before but I've always been indifferent to it, you know, I can take this or leave it," ha, can you imagine, you know, if you came across somebody who sincerely said, "You know, when it comes to the nutrition that is essential to life, I could take it or leave it. If I don't eat, you know, I don't care." And absent some kind of debilitating disease or mental incapacity, nobody talks that way. We all understand we have to eat to survive. We all need water to survive and we wouldn't just discount that and say, "Well, those desires aren't important." You'd be laughed out of the room. They'd lock you up in a room and put a white coat on you and say, "You need help." Well, you see, the whole point here is that if you think that you can be indifferent to righteousness and still be a true Christian, you need help. Something is wrong with you if you're like that because that's not the way the spiritual realm works in the kingdom of God.

So here's the question, this hunger and thirst for righteousness: what exactly is Jesus talking about? Let's be a little more specific. What kind of righteousness is this? I love the word "context." Context tells you everything because as you continue to read on in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus makes it obvious the kind of righteousness that he's talking about. What are the longings of the redeemed heart, what does that look like, what are different signposts that would say this desire is resident in your heart? Well, among many many other things, he calls you to sincere worship without hypocrisy, Matthew 6. You know, when you pray, go into your inner room. Pray to your Father who is secret, not so that you can make a show before men that they will applaud you for. He calls you to obedience in the heart, that you would long to be pure in your heart because Jesus speaks, "He who is angry with his brother is as guilty as those who murder him. Those who lust after a woman are as guilty as the physical act of adultery." He calls you to trust your Father. "Stop being anxious," he says in Matthew 6:25. "Make the kingdom of God your priority." So those are just little snippets to help you see that there is a God-oriented perspective on these things that says, "My heart is after the true word of God. My heart is after, it desires true worship. My heart desires to trust my Father and not dishonor him with my anxiety about my personal life or about what's happening in the world around me. I want that. I want my heart to be pleasing to Christ," is the kind of righteousness of which he speaks. So he calls you to reject hypocrisy, sinful anger, sinful lust. He calls you – watch this every one of you, some of you men in particular – he calls you to reject that spirit of retaliation that says, "I'm going to pay him back for what he did to me." Reject all of that. He tells you to love your enemies as well as your friends. Wow. That's

the kind of righteousness of which he speaks. You read Matthew 5, 6 and 7, and you see the kind of righteousness that he's saying that the truly redeemed will desire.

And here's the thing, here's the key for grasping, understanding that hunger for righteousness. You and I, we all understand that we fall short of that standard of perfection. Jesus said Matthew 5:48, "You are to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." We understand that we fall short of that. We don't boast and say, "I have arrived." We reject that idea of sanctification that says that it's perfect in this life. We reject that. It's false and not true to Scripture and not true to experience. But what's different, but what matters, what's different about the Christian is that when a true Christian hears this call to righteousness, he doesn't resist it, he doesn't reject it. He says, "I understand that I fall short but I want to tell you something, that life of which Jesus speaks is desirable. That's what I want my life to be like. That's what's attractive to me. That's where my affections reside." That's the spirit of hungering and thirsting after righteousness. It recognizes the blessed authority of our Lord Jesus Christ. It realizes that what he says is true and has authority over you and you say, "Do you know what? I want that. If Christ wants that in my life, that's what I want too." There's not this resistance, this pushback that says, "I don't care what the Bible says, I'm going to do it my way. I don't care what Scripture says about marriage, I'm out of here." None of that in the heart of one who is truly redeemed.

Charles Spurgeon said this and I quote, he says, "This desire toward righteousness is not a faint one which feebly says, 'I wish I could be righteous.' It is a longing which, like hunger and thirst, abides with a man and masters him. He carries it to his work, carries it to his house, carries it to his bed, carries it wherever he himself goes, for it rules him with its imperative demands." You see, this desire for righteousness is an overarching compelling principle that goes with you everywhere and it's the filter through which you view life. You're at work, your question is: what does righteousness look like for my life here? In your marriage, in your family, in the privacy of your own home: what does righteousness look like here? In the realm of the church and the fellowship of believers: how can I be righteous here? And there is just this consuming desire, this hunger and thirst, that your life would be pleasing to Christ as expressed in the kind of righteous life, zealous for the good deeds, Titus 2:14, that he calls you to. You want your life to be like this, even though you recognize you fall short. There is this desire. You could think about it this way: there is this pilot light lit in your soul that is always on waiting to be fanned, waiting to be turned up, that is never fully extinguished and Jesus says, "If that's your heart attitude, that's your response to the word of God, the righteous call of God in your life," Jesus says, "you're blessed." Why are you blessed? Because that's the mark of someone who belongs to the kingdom. It shows that God has saved you and is at work in your life and that's reason to rejoice.

You say, "But I fall short and, you know, I got angry, I blew my top just this morning before we were leaving for church." I get that. The episodes of failure, of sin in your life, however, are not the sole prism through which you look at these things. How do you respond to that? You say, "Oh, I hated it! I wish I wasn't like that! It just clings to me and I would wash myself of it and be rid of it if only I could!" You see, that's the desire for

righteousness, not contradicted by the fact that it is pockmarked by your sin and failure from day-to-day, sometimes from hour-to-hour, not that but the question is: what do you want to be like? Are you content to be angry? Are you satisfied in your anger and your lust and say, "I don't even care what I'm like. This is my life and it's my sin and that's the way I like it and don't try to talk me out of it, preacher." Well, you know, that's a mark of darkness. The heart that is broken over sin, that is poor in spirit, that mourns when you sin and dishonor your Lord, that's the mark of the desire for righteousness. You see, it's not contradicted by your imperfection. Jesus is speaking beyond that and saying, "What's at the core of your priorities and what you want?" And it's a blessed realization to realize that his blood covers those places where you fail and he graciously, God graciously accepts you on the merit of Christ despite that imperfection, that sin even in your life as a Christian. He's really good, isn't he? He's really gracious. He's really kind to accept us for the sake of Christ and all this passage is saying is that the one who sees that and is resting in Christ and has been born again, desires these things, has a hunger and thirst for it.

Well, Jesus goes on. Point 2 here this morning: I want to talk about the satisfaction of hunger. The satisfaction of hunger and, oh, do I like this! I know I say that about every text. Well, do you know what? That's okay, you do too. You like all of the word of God, don't you, if you've been born again? The satisfaction of hunger. Here is a wonderful truth for you to see. This is fundamental about spiritual life. Jesus here is not, as he talks about this hunger, this longing for righteousness, understand this: he's pronouncing blessing. He says this is a place of privilege. This is not a place of frustration. This is not a place of discouragement to have these desires. Jesus says this is a place of blessing. This is a life of satisfaction.

Look at Matthew 5:6 with me again. He says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." Do you know what? This word for "satisfied," it's from the same realm, the same semantic domain as the words for "hunger and thirst." You eat a good meal and you had that feeling of contentment that says, "That was good," and you are content, you are satisfied. That urging of hunger has been removed for the time being and you say, "Ah, that's good. I think I'm going to go and take a nap." Really dumb for a preacher to talk that way and put people's mind in that realm but, hey, I trust you. We operate on a principle of trust here at Truth Community.

The word "satisfied" that Jesus uses here describes that feeling of fulfillment that comes after you've eaten. When Jesus fed the 5,000, for example in Matthew 14, the Bible says they all ate and were satisfied. It's the same word here in Matthew 5:6. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness," why? "For they will be satisfied." That there is contentment in the midst of that desire. There is contentment to satisfy that desire. When the 5,000 ate, their desire had been quenched. Hunger yielded over to contentment. Well, in a similar way, beloved, when you understand the work of God in salvation and what he has ahead for those of us who have believed, there is nothing possible for you but a feeling of contentment, satisfaction, a realization that it is well for you, and this sense of satisfaction in some ways exists, coexists side-by-side with the desires of which Jesus speaks. We want to talk about the satisfaction in its present dimension and its future dimension here this morning.

Let's not miss something really obvious. When you desire righteousness, when you want to turn from sin and you want to be pleasing to God, don't miss the obvious point: the ultimate supreme fulfillment of your desire for righteousness is found in Christ. 1 Corinthians 1:30, he is our righteousness. That we rest in a righteousness that is not our own. The perfection of righteousness, righteousness is found in Christ and so we are delighted, we are glad to know that there is someone in the universe who embodies this perfect righteousness and who has walked on this earth and who is our brother in heaven. He has a righteousness that satisfies every longing of my heart and even satisfies the demands of the holiness and the law of God.

It is satisfied there and then you realize, you realize that this righteousness of Christ – oh, follow me, beloved. Thinking about yourself vertically before God, you in sin and all of that, realizing that that perfect righteousness of Christ which echoes throughout his universe and has never faltered once and never will because he is utterly impeccable, he cannot sin, to realize that the greatness of his righteousness, the perfection of the way that he obeyed the law of God when he was on earth, that what God did in your justification was he took the full wonder, the infinite merit of that righteousness of Christ and said, "I'm going to count it to you. I'm going to credit you with the merits of a life and a righteousness that you did not live and I'm going to accept the righteousness of Christ as the basis upon which you can approach me." And you realize all of a sudden that your sin has been accounted for; that Christ has satisfied the demands of the law of God on your behalf, and now it is satisfied. Righteousness is completed, perfected for the one who believes in Christ, not that you have been made righteous but you have been declared righteous on the basis of the righteousness of Christ. The demands of God's law against you have been fully satisfied in Christ. God accepts his perfect righteousness on your behalf and now you have rest. The demands of the bar of God are satisfied and will never be brought up against you again. Scripture says that your sins have been removed from you as far as the east is from the west; that God will not hold them against you anymore. Christian, do you realize that as you sit here today, you are in a position where God is not going to hold your sins against you and that that is an act of grace on his part because he accepted Christ in your place? Wow. And you say, "Ah, I'm content. I can rest there. The fact that I fall short has been answered by Christ." And therefore you're content. You are satisfied. You realize, putting it in different terms, you realize that you have an objective peace with God that can never be broken because it is based on a righteousness that is not your own. You are satisfied. It's great.

Now, there is a sense as we talk about this present satisfaction and we rejoice in the completion of the righteousness of Christ, there is still a sense in which we still thirst, isn't there? I'll explain what we mean by that; you're going to nod in agreement quickly. We still thirst because we realize that in our practice, we fall short of the glory of the position that God has given to us. God has given us this perfect position in Christ but as we walk through life, our feet get dirty, sullied by our own sin, shortcomings. We realize, you realize, beloved – oh, this becomes so very very practical. This hits, what I'm about to say, hits each one of you exactly where you live. Every one of you. You realize that you still struggle with sin. You still live in a world environment that is hostile to Christ.

Scripture informs you that you are still wrestling with principalities, with an unseen spiritual realm that is hostile to Christ and to your spiritual growth. And with Paul in Romans 7, you say, "The things that I want to do, I don't do. The things that I don't want to do, I do. I have this tension in me." Yeah, no kidding. Do you know why that tension is there in the life of the redeemed? Do you know why it's a tension? Because there is a controlling fundamental principle that says, "My great desire is for righteousness, for godliness. I want to be like that." And you have the sense of still knowing that in practice you're falling short.

Well, there was another place in Scripture where Paul made it plain that he understood that tension completely. Look at Philippians 3:8, Paul says, "I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him," watch this, "not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ." He says, "I realize that the righteous demands of God are fulfilled for me in Christ and I received them by faith, and so I am satisfied not with a righteousness of my own but there is a righteousness applied to my account that belongs to me by faith." Verse 10, "that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead." Satisfied. "A righteousness not my own has been given to me through faith in Christ and this is wonderful," he says.

And yet, first 12, he goes on and speaks of the tension. He says, "Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect." There is still a dimension in my personal experience that fall short of that and I haven't attained to that aspect of it yet. I yearn for more of this in my personal experience. Look at it, he says, "I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus." Saying, "I press on. There is more that I want. I realize the judicial side has been satisfied. I realize that God accepts me completely in Christ but I want that place in my life where my experiences conform to it fully. I press on." What is he saying when he presses on except, "I desire more." In the language of Christ, he is saying, "I hunger and thirst for righteousness." He is satisfied and yet he is still hungry. That's our experience on earth. That's the tension in which we live. You know it by personal experience, don't you? You know what it's like. Sure you do. Jesus said, on the authority of the Son of God we say, "If you know what that is describing, you're blessed. You are in a position of divine privilege. You're a son or a daughter of the kingdom of God." What a great place to be. That's the present aspect of it.

And now we kind of board a rocketship and we launch into orbit with the final aspect of this, talking about the satisfaction of hunger, and we talked about the present satisfaction mingled with some dissatisfaction but let's talk about the future satisfaction. Jesus in this verse bids you, he calls you to wait patiently, to endure that tension that is only by comparison for a moment, for the sake of what is yet to come. Look at Matthew 5:6 again. Turn back there. If your Bible is like mine, it's starting to turn automatically to the Beatitudes and it just naturally falls open there. Matthew 5:6, let's read the text one more time together, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall

be satisfied." Future tense. Something that is still coming. You have that desire within you, think about it this way, in a sense it is a down payment on greater satisfaction yet to come. It is a guarantee. The fact that that is an abiding spiritual thirst in your heart for righteousness, is an indication that God is ultimately going to bring final and complete satisfaction in the future.

At the Last Supper, Matthew 26, Jesus said as he raised the cup, he told his disciples, "I will not drink the fruit of this vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." Let me say that again. I don't want you to miss this. "I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." Christian, do you realize, do you remember, is it set in your mind as a defining disposition through which you view life, that you have a coming banquet with a King. That you're going to be with Christ in his kingdom. You'll drink that fruit of the vine with him. You'll see him face-to-face. Sin will be banished. The enemies of the cross will be gone. Satan will be expelled. All that's going to be there is Christ and the saints perfected in righteousness and we are going to be with him somehow, someway. I'm not being literal here, somewhat metaphorically, somehow raising the cup, we all raise the cup to the honor of Christ and drink it with him. Do you know what it's going to be like then? That is going to be a moment of perfect satisfaction, realizing that all of the promises in which you have trusted have been fulfilled in a way that you cannot comprehend now; to realize that this is permanent, this is eternal, that this presence of bliss and peace and righteousness with Christ is never going to be diminished, and you are with him and it is going to echo in your heart, "This is what I've been longing for! This is why I was created! This is what the purpose of my redemption was!" And as I like to tell people, in that time, trust God's word. Don't take my word for it. Trust God's word, you will not be disappointed at that time. You're not going to be let down. "Oh, I thought it was going to be so much better." No. He who believes in him will never be disappointed. That is your destiny. This is what lies ahead for you in Christ, to be with him in his consummated kingdom and belonging there, being perfected, rid of sin, and your ultimate desire for righteousness will be permanently established and fulfilled. In the end, God settles the accounts.

Beloved, mark it. I know I just pounded the pulpit, didn't I? Mark it. You see, I'm not angry when I do that most of the time. I'm not angry now. Mark it: in the end, you will be satisfied completely with how God has dealt with your soul. You will be completely content, rejoicing with how he has dealt with all of humanity and how he has dealt with you and you're going to say, "This is what I've been longing for and now I have longings no more because I have reached the perfection. Christ did what he said he would do. He delivered me over to the perfection of the satisfaction of my desires." And on that day, beloved, your satisfaction will be complete. It will be perfect. There will be no diminishment, nothing to detract from it. Nothing. On that day, all the longings of your heart are going to find their fulfillment. But for now Peter said, 2 Peter 3:13, according to his promise, we're looking for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. When that new heavens and new earth arrives with all of that perfection of righteousness, then will your fulfillment of what Jesus said in Matthew 5:6 be complete. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."

Oh, we're satisfied now in Christ but yet there is a greater satisfaction coming for those who belong to the kingdom.

Do you belong to Christ? Do you know something about those desires? Rejoice because you're blessed and better things await you. Are these desires foreign to your experience? Nothing that you know anything about? Beloved, Christ would invite you, "Come to me for the day of salvation has come to you now."

Let's pray together.

By your Spirit, O God, search our hearts. Affirm to those of us that know you that we truly are yours. Deepen that assurance that is the birthright, the privilege and the prerogative of every true Christian. Lead us to that. And for those who are still dead in their sin, O God, awaken in them a desire for this kingdom that they might turn to Christ and be saved. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.