

Matthew 5:6-8

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[0 : 00] Good morning, friends. Nope, nope.

Something, something, nope.! Is that better? I hope we're good.

! Friends, will you join me in prayer? Father in heaven, holy, holy, holy is your name.

We do not deserve to stand in your presence. We do not deserve to hear from your word. We do not deserve to be bought by the blood of Jesus Christ, but you in your great grace and in your great love and in your great mercy have redeemed us and bought us at the highest price.

So, Lord, will you excite our hearts to hear your word today? Will you make my words effective in our own hearts, in my own heart?

[1 : 14] Will you be glorified as our hearts are turned to worship and as we are conformed more to the likeness of Jesus Christ, our elder brother, our Savior, and our King.

We pray that in his name and his name alone. Amen. I invite you to turn with me to Matthew chapter 5 as we continue our sermon series in Matthew's gospel.

We have arrived last week on the Sermon of the Mount, which is perhaps the most well-known sermon in the history of the world. Today we are continuing in Matthew chapter 5, verses 6 through 8.

If you need a Bible, they are on the back table, already bookmarked to today's passage. And if you don't own a Bible, that's our gift to you. As you turn there, I'll tell you a quick story.

See, the Coast Guard Academy, there are a total of eight majors, and half of them are engineering degrees. Half of the remaining degrees are technical degrees. Poets are in short supply at the academy.

[2 : 26] So when I wanted to learn to communicate like a real person, not in technical jargon or in acronyms, I'm sorry guys, but I got to tell you the truth, right?

I had this study. Like I literally had to go read about how to communicate to people. I had to look at what it is to tell a narrative, to tell a story.

And those of you who have studied the humanities, or maybe those of you who are simply natural storytellers, know that the first rule of storytelling is show.

Don't tell. Don't spoon-feed information to people like I'm doing to you right now, actually. Don't spoon-feed information to your hearers if you can help them experience it for themselves.

Show. Don't tell. For instance, I could tell you she was sad. Or maybe if I really wanted to drive it home, I could tell you she was really sad.

[3 : 31] But I could show you. The tears that flooded her eyes turned the whole room to blurred shapes and smudged colors.

She fought back sobs that heaved up from her diaphragm, but could only soften them. She looked in the mirror and said to herself, what's the point? And now that might be a former engineer's overwrought and melodramatic attempt to show you sadness.

But what happens when a master communicator, the one who formed man's mouth, shows and doesn't just tell?

What happens when his message isn't just she was sad, but is the very words of life? You might get something like, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

It's a simple and compact statement, but Jesus in it communicates a world of meaning. The first thing we see is that he's talking about our desires.

[4 : 53] Hunger and thirst are your body's longings for the things they need, the things they crave. And Jesus here is obviously talking about the desires of our heart. What does your heart want?

Jesus wants to know. Yes, he does care about how we act, and you see the next beatitude is blessed are the merciful. But our actions come from somewhere, don't they?
The overflow of the heart. And so Jesus cares what you want. Where do wants come from? Where do your desires exist, and what forms them?
They aren't held in your mind. They aren't shaped by your mind, right? You know that you should go to bed, but you want to watch cat videos until 2 a.m.
And so at 3 a.m., when your phone runs out of battery, you actually go to sleep, right? I know I should only eat one brownie, but I want to eat one tray of brownies.
[6 : 01] And so when there are so few brownies left that it is now socially awkward for me to eat any more, I will only eat one more, right? And it's not just the small stuff, right?
It's not just the light stuff. Ku Klux Klan members all went to school, which means they've all had some sense of civil rights education.
They know racism is hateful, unproductive, and evil, and yet they still want to, and therefore do, don a white hood.
Government leaders know that dropping chemical weapons on civilian populations is an insane evil. That knowledge does not stop them, though, as recently as this last year, from doing just that when it gets them what they want.
What you want trumps what you know every day of the week. You and I, we live from our desires.
[7 : 16] That's true for people outside this room, and it's true for you, and it's true for me. That's why Jesus cares what you hunger and thirst for.
And that is an interesting phrase, isn't it? Hunger and thirst. Now, he could have said, blessed are those who do righteous things, but again, our actions spring from something deeper, our desires. He could have said, blessed are those who prioritize righteousness. But he's more interested in the thing, deep down, that drives our prioritization, right?
And he could have said, even, blessed are those who want righteousness. That's certainly close to where we're headed. But Jesus shows us something in this word picture that goes a little bit deeper than that.
Hunger and thirst have to do with your very nature, right? Physical hunger and thirst are primal, instinctive desires. You don't have to choose them.
[8 : 21] You simply have urges because you're a living person. Your reasoning doesn't produce hunger. Your habits don't produce thirst.
Your hunger and your thirst in a physical sense come from your physical nature. And hungers and thirsts in your soul come from your spiritual nature.
You can tell a lot about the state of your soul by taking a step back and considering just what is it that I want. If our hungers and thirsts spring from our nature, well, we can't change our spiritual desires any more than we can change on our own our physical desires.
Can you change your physical desire for food when you haven't eaten? Or your physical thirst for water when you're dehydrated?
No, that's just you. That's what you do because you're a living body. Certainly you can deny those desires. We call that a diet. But that hasn't changed what you want.
[9 : 35] You're simply saying no to it. Now, you can also deny bad sinful and evil spiritual desires.
Hungers for sin, thirsts for unrighteousness. But that's not. That's not the person Jesus blesses here. He does not say blessed are those who hunger and thirst for unrighteousness but still act nice.
That's not what he says. He says, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled.
The Lord blesses those whose nature, whose hearts long for righteousness. Which leads us to ask what does he mean by righteousness?
And how do we get a nature that longs for it? One author whom I greatly admire explains the hunger and thirst for righteousness in three parts.
[10 : 42] He says it means a desire to be free from sin because sin separates us from God. It also means a desire to be free from the power of sin. And it means a desire to be free from the very desire for sin.
I like that. A hunger, a thirst for righteousness is a hunger to be rid of my own guilt before God. It's a thirst to be liberated from sin's power over my life.

And it's a heart deep desire to be rid of its presence once and for all. And I think if you ask most people to define righteousness, they'll give you some kind of answer that looks like that. No more sin. But that's only half of righteousness. If we look at it like that, righteousness isn't sin. That's what it is. It's not sin. We might miss the other half. What righteousness is. What is it? [11:51] It's not just a vacuum, an absence of something. Righteousness isn't just, don't be mean. It's not just kill off the works of the flesh.

It's also, we see today, be merciful. Put on the fruit of the Spirit. If our view of righteousness and the Christian life is merely, stop sinning so much.

No wonder righteousness and holiness and religion sound boring. And feel lifeless. And our hearts aren't hungering for it.

That's replacing the fleeting pleasures of sin, the thrills of lust, the fattening of greed, which are at least exciting with nothing. So of course we won't convince the world to abandon their hunger and thirst for self and sin with a hearty, stop it.

And we won't convince ourselves either. Now maybe they and we will stop the, kind of the surface level sins, like swearing or gossiping.

[13:07] Maybe. But, stop it doesn't compete with the big stuff. Doesn't compete with heart deep desires that shape the way we live our lives.

What do you mean I have to abandon my same-sex partner whom I love and replace that person with your nothing?

That's what stop it says. What do you mean I have to abandon my very exciting promiscuity and replace it with your nothing?

nothing. That's what stop it says. What do you mean I have to replace my life of pleasure in this or that with your message of stop it?

If righteousness is just the absence of sin, nobody hungers and thirsts for that nothing. That doesn't even make sense. That doesn't even make sense. But righteousness isn't an empty thing, merely the absence of sin.

[14:23] It is that but it is so much more. Something to hunger after, something to thirst for. Christians don't abandon sin for a stoic, austere life devoid of desire and joy.

No, no, no. The church isn't the no fun club. Christians deny sinful pleasures because we hunger and thirst for better pleasures.

We hunger and thirst after righteousness and righteousness is found ultimately in Jesus Christ. What Christians want, what their new nature hungers for, what their hearts desire and thirst for is God himself.

And he says they will be satisfied. the king left his throne for me. He died on a cross for me. He broke death for me. He sends his spirit to me. I walk with him. Not in some abstract, distant sense.

[15:25] I hunger and thirst after him and I am filled literally with his spirit. That is true of every Christian. So I get to pour out my soul to him and he comforts me as his spirit mediates his love to my soul.

He speaks to me in his word and he fosters eternal hope in my soul. The Christian life is alive and it is meant to be hungered after, thirsted for.

We do not offer a giant stop it sign to the world. We offer Jesus Christ. Righteousness isn't mainly the absence of sin in your life.

It's mainly the powerful presence of God and he gives us grace and he gives us life and he gives us peace and hope and joy and yes his presence does drive out sin but that's not the main feature.

Jesus doesn't offer you a life of pale lifeless denial. He offers you his righteousness. He offers you himself.

[16:40] It is better and it is more lasting than anything this world has on offer. It's better than sex. It's better than money. It beats everything that this world puts before your eyes.

Do you want to be happy? Who doesn't? This text is immediately applicable and relevant to you.

You can be happy, blessed in Jesus Christ and maybe for the very first time. If you've never turned away from looking for your final happiness in stuff or in self or in sin turn to Jesus today.

Look to him. The author and perfecter of our faith and see him. See his powerful gentleness. We talked about meekness last week. See his pure love. See his compassion.

See his wisdom. See his victory over hypocrisy and evil and sin and the guilt that we have and our final enemy death itself. See him as the old hymn says that he is the fountain of every blessing and see that he offers you not just the blessings but the fountain himself.

[17 : 56] If you see him his beautiful righteousness and he is changing your heart so you are beginning to hunger and thirst for him know that it is your unrighteousness that separates you from him.

Your pursuit of the false gods of pride and money and sex and sin and everything else that is not him has earned for you an infinite wrath because it strikes against an infinite God but he is not content to leave you there in your unrighteousness and let that stand in the way.

Jesus went to the cross and there received the blow of that infinite wrath and if you are joined to him by faith two things happen your unrighteousness is placed on his shoulders and extinguished on his cross and his righteousness is placed on your shoulders the scriptures say you if you are in Christ Jesus you are in him who became to us wisdom from God righteousness and sanctification and redemption stop looking for your purpose and your pleasure to satisfy your hunger and your thirst in places that don't finally offer it seeking happiness and everyone seeks happiness in sin is eating poison its fleeting pleasure won't even fill your stomach and it will destroy you poison does not fill you up right lashing out in any kind of hate and anger at someone else doesn't fill you up no one is satisfied in that but the poison does destroy you faster poison doesn't fill you up sexual immorality right it's a bottomless pit the more you indulge the more you want and need its hunger only increases no one is satisfied by it no one and it rots your heart robbing you of life until other people become sensual commodities and you become a consumption machine it doesn't even have to be things that look sinister seeking your final happiness and everyone seeks happiness in something as innocuous as entertainment you know living for the weekend is eating sand sure it will fill your stomach you won't be hungry you won't feel a desire for something more maybe but you will starve because it is a distraction not sustenance you will starve to death with a full belly ecclesiastes! 5 says he who loves money will not be satisfied with money nor he who loves wealth with his income this is vanity and so

God says in Isaiah 55 why do you spend your money for that which is not bread and your labor for that which does not satisfy friends let us abandon our hopes that anything besides God will fill our hunger and cool our thirst there is a fountain of blessing that never runs dry and his name is Jesus his joys don't end because he has risen from the grave and lives eternally and offers himself to us forever his delights don't distract or corrupt or poison because he himself is the way the truth and the life in him is light and that light is the life of men don't be consumed by the pursuit of small trinkets like sex success and stuff which do not last and whose peaks are but foothills next to the mountaintop that is seeing

Christ face to face and so God concludes that call in Isaiah 55 saying come everyone who thirsts come to the waters and he who has no money come buy and eat come buy wine and milk without money and without price listen diligent to me listen diligently to me and eat what is good and delight yourselves in rich food blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness that's practical for those who need to come to Christ for the first time it's also practical for Christians who doubt whether they are right with God who ask the question am I really saved we call that question the assurance of salvation now assurance of salvation was on people's minds very much right where we're sitting in

[23 : 45] New England in the 1700s as the entire region exploded with religious fervor church attendance spiked it was in the news it was on everybody's minds revival swept through this whole region and today we call that move of God the first great awakening it stands as one of the great revivals in church history but anytime something becomes popular you tend to get the real fans and the hangers on right oh I liked that band before they went mainstream that kind of thing the people who actually get it and have bought in and those who are just along for the ride because it's the thing to do these days and Christians wanted to know both church leaders and the people in the pews who are like am I good am I saved how many people here are born again into a new life with

Christ and how many are just here for the show how many people are self deceived and some of you sitting here today might just be wondering that about your own soul am I really saved this passage helps us last week we saw that the entrance into the Christian life is being poor that is destitute a beggar in spirit nothing in my hands I bring only to thy cross I cling the beggar who knows they have nothing to commend themselves to God can only cry out to him in mercy and the

Lord blesses them blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven and that is a picture friends of salvation so you don't need to have a shining light experience to know that you're saved you don't need to be able to point to some like a date on the calendar like that was the instant it happened in my life for some of us we have that but not everyone does you don't need to have a catalog of obedience for God to give you the kingdom of heaven you just need to know in your heart that you stand condemned before a holy God with no way to your own salvation and cry out to Jesus for his great grace and mercy and he will give you two things salvation and new birth new birth that comes with heart deep desires for righteousness and so one pastor from this region during the great awakening was very helpful his name was Jonathan Edwards and some would say that the great awakening actually started kind of in his church and radiated outwards he was very concerned that believers be comforted by the hope of their salvation but that also non-Christians know their non-Christians and not have a false hope he studied the scriptures and in 1746 wrote a book called The Religious Affections the first half of that book is all about warning people away from basing their confidence of their salvation on things that do not bear on it but things that we could mistake as signs of real conversion things like how much of the bible you know you could be a brand new christian and only know john 316 or you could be a non-christian who has the entire bible memorized the amount of bible verses you know do not make you a christian you can't base your confidence on church attendance either in 1746 jonathan edwards did not have a garage but we have a saying these days he would agree with sitting in a pew or a hotel ballroom seat does not make you a christian any more than sitting in a garage makes you a car you aren't born again just because you get really excited at church you might just be an excitable person right edwards wanted to know what does new birth look like he went to the scriptures and the second half of his book is all about the true marks of conversion i'll spoil it a little for you the new birth looks just as the scriptures teach they look like the beatitudes and it looks like the fruit of the spirit you've got the cliff nuts here's edwards summary statement true religion in great part consists in holy affections in other words new birth looks like hungering and thirsting for righteousness so if you're here today doubting your salvation these two sermons in the beatitudes prompt you to ask two questions that should help yourself first are you poor in spirit do you know you have nothing to bring before God for your own acceptance and are you I don't care if you know about what point in time it happened but are you this moment trusting in Christ for the salvation of your soul trusting in his cross and his empty tomb and second do you hunger and thirst after righteousness do you have a new spiritual appetite which is the evidence of new birth now don't confuse that with obeying God enough Jesus doesn't say blessed are those who have done enough righteousness but ask yourself has God changed your spiritual desires do you admire his law do you trust him and want what his will is for your life even if you haven't got yet the strength to obey that's new birth and Jesus says to the poor in spirit theirs is the kingdom of heaven and he says to those who hunger and thirst for righteousness they will be satisfied but there may be others here today that I need to warn and not comfort if you disagree with God and don't admire his law if I have to convince you that sin is sinful if what I have said makes you feel like you have license to sin if what I've said has made you think you're okay and I would now need to convince you to want to change your life I am scared for your soul because it tells me you do not hunger and thirst!

[31 : 23] for righteousness it tells me you hunger and thirst for something else and want to use Jesus as fire insurance that's not new birth and I'm not saying are you rid of every desire for sin because every time we sin it's out of our desires out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks we need to ask ourselves is do I have a born from above desire for righteousness that combats my sinful desires last new birth he who has ears to hear let him hear this passage is practical for those who have not yet believed in Christ this passage is practical for those who are struggling with doubts about their salvation it convicts us and confronts us it's also practical for us today today in at least two ways in verse seven we see it's practical for the way we live our daily life and then in verse eight we are going to see that it is practical for our happiness today and forever blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy now there's a definite order in these beatitudes it's no surprise then that mimicking

God's grace is the first result of hungering and thirsting for his righteousness what is the key to mercy as far as us producing it in our own hearts well it's the first beatitude recognizing our own spiritual condition and the grace that God has shown us John Piper put it this way mercy comes from a heart that has first felt its spiritual bankruptcy and has come to grief over its sin and has

learned to wait meekly for the timing of the Lord and to cry out in hunger for the work of his mercy to satisfy us with the righteousness we need and what you just saw him do is walk through verses three through six the first beatitudes and once that heart has received mercy from God our mercy comes from his mercy our mercy to each other comes from

God's mercy to us in Matthew chapter 18 Jesus tells the story of an unmerciful servant this servant owed his master a great sum of money the master forgave it gave him a great mercy afterwards he went to one of his peers and demanded the repayment of a much smaller debt the other man couldn't pay so he had him thrown in prison the master who forgave the much greater debt caught wind of this and was furious then his master summoned him and said to him you wicked servant I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant as I had mercy on you how could you hunger and thirst after righteousness yet try to fill yourself with unrighteousness mercy like the mercy

God showed us on the cross is choosing not to punish someone who has wronged you or owes you but rather to absorb the cost of that yourself spouses take notice employees take notice parents and children take notice friends take notice neighbors take notice you live in a fallen world and you have opportunities for mercy every day when someone perhaps a co-worker speaks a harsh word to you you can hunger for your own justice and reply with hostility right or you can thirst for righteousness you can remember your spiritual poverty how your sin spoke against the Lord yet he chose to speak the word forgiven over you will that love well up out of your heart into a gentle word choosing not to punish someone with our harsh words that's mercy when someone perhaps a family member is inconsiderate towards you you can hunger for your own priorities and make them pay in all manner of ways or you can thirst for righteousness you can recall how you have been and continue to be inconsiderate towards your father in heaven how in the face of someone else's inconsiderate act you regularly fail to consider Christ and his cross yet he is not ashamed to call you friend and to welcome you into his arms in fellowship will that cheer your heart so you can reply in a considerate way to an inconsiderate person choosing not to punish someone who has wronged you that's mercy when someone perhaps a friend takes advantage of you you can hunger for your own advantage and look for ways to exploit them right back or you can thirst for righteousness you can remember how your every sin takes advantage of

[37 : 41] God's grace yet he chooses to love you anyway will that soften your heart toward that person so you can absorb the cost choosing not to punish someone who has wronged you that's mercy and you see how the gospel shapes and drives our mercy blessed are the merciful for they will receive mercy none of these examples mean you must suffer always in silence though often that might be the wise course of action other times and I pray that you will have wisdom for this you can and should tell the person who has wronged you that they did damage but never in wrath never to get even always to promote peace next week Jesus is going to say blessed are the peacemakers the person who hungers and thirsts for righteousness will be filled how

God delights to indwell them by his holy spirit he fulfills them as they produce a glorious mercy that reflects his own and finally the culmination of the hunger and thirst for righteousness he says blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God I expect you know where I will go with this so I will keep it brief the heart that hungers and thirsts for righteousness it's given to a person from God and its highest desire is God himself here then is the great reward God himself when you stand before the throne of heaven you are in Christ he will complete the good work he started in you and you will be completely holy and you will be able to bear the white hot brilliance of his glory and you will be filled finally fully and forever find hope and peace in that most wonderful promise especially as we move next week into the final three blessings which all look to the conflict that comes when the new man rubs against the grain of this world's ways but don't look only at the last day your future hope and miss the joy that this beatitude offers you today in 1

Corinthians 13 the apostle Paul says now we see God in a mirror dimly but then that is on the last day face to face now I know in part then I shall know fully even as I have been fully known now certainly that means that the greatest glory is a future reality for us and our hope is not in this world or in today but in the last day in Christ's victory there but Paul still says we see God now even if it's through mirror dimly that's veiled but it's still real last fall as we walked through Paul's letter to the Colossians we heard him say since you have been raised with Christ seek the things that are above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God set your minds on things that are above not on things that are on earth that's practical this beatitude is practical for your happiness!

today if God is the greatest good the greatest joy put your eyes on him you don't go to the movies and close your eyes and not see it they are meant to be seen God is meant to be beheld and walking through the valley of the shadow of death well it's terrifying and dark when you look only at the darkness but if your eyes are set on God there is light and there is hope and there is joy even in the midst of harshest trials and so setting your mind on Christ makes sad moments more bearable it fills lonely times with fellowship with your risen savior it gives boring moments meaning because he is there gives confusing and chaotic events a bedrock on which to stand how how do we do this how do we get and receive and walk in this joy today

Paul said set your eyes on Christ that means things like being in the word and being in prayer it means recalling that you are living each moment from the exciting to the mundane the blessed to the oppressed before him and with him if you are in Christ he is with you as you ride a roller coaster or as you do the dishes he is with you on your wedding day a great day of joy he is also with you on the day of your spouse's funeral day of great sadness grace means filling your day with reminders of his grace his goodness and his glory you could do that in your physical surroundings I've been to some of your homes and they're filled with things that remind you of Christ and his grace means filling your day on your calendar with reminders of his goodness it means filling your day in your community as well with reminders of his glory when we were still meeting as a house church in the fall of 2015

[44 : 07] I remember Jordan preached a sermon in Ephesians 2 and his words have stuck with me he said if you want to see God at work throw yourself into the church and last we do it by renewing our quest to by God's grace set our hunger and thirst on righteousness not sin one pastor put it this way sin so defiles and corrupts our lives that we cannot see or enjoy what is best therefore sin is a great joy killer the impurity of sin so distorts our perception that we cannot see God as desirable therefore sin makes the greatest joys impossible sin is like putting blinders on it obscures our view of

God if you have never placed your trust in Christ sin obscures him completely from your view because his wrath remains on you if you belong to Christ but your eyes are set on sin it will obscure his glory and rob you of your joy blessed are the pure in heart but they will see God friends let's pray are merciful for those