

*Righteously Satisfied, Mercifully Forgiven*

A sermon preached by Dr. John Clayton at Covenant Presbyterian Church of Fort Smith, Arkansas on June 17, 2018.

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy (Matt. 5:6–7).*

Have you grown comfortable with your sins? I mean, comparatively you aren't too bad, are you? Besides, shouldn't you be comfortable with who you are? Just the way you are? The Bible talks a lot about sin, but is it really sin? Instead of calling it sin, could we just redefine it as who you are or how you were born? Your grandparents said you inherited that old "Irish temper." Why can't your grandchildren say they inherited their homosexuality? Even as Christians, we compare ourselves with others, justify our sin, and become satisfied with our own perceived righteousness, we fall into what D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones called "spiritual depression."

Sadly, many Christians are living in spiritual depression. They have sought to satisfy their spiritual hunger on the food of this world, the delicacies enticing to the flesh, the desserts of the devil. They have sought to satisfy their spiritual thirst on the water of the stagnant pools of the world, the flesh, and the devil. We give money to feed the physically starving and build wells for thirsty people, but all around us there is a spiritual famine.

Do you know what it is like to crave something that never satisfies? You do, and so do I. Just as our bodies must be nourished physically, our souls were created to be nourished spiritually. Yet, when we crave sin and seek to satisfy our spiritual hunger and thirst on it, we are left with nothing but emptiness. We become more and more spiritually depressed seeking to be spiritually nourished on sin but never being satisfied. What is the remedy for spiritual depression? Where may spiritual nourishment be found? How may your spiritual thirst be quenched?

First, you must be "poor in spirit." It must be supernaturally revealed to your soul that you are spiritually bankrupt. You must see, by God's grace, that your only hope is to be spiritually born again, by faith in Christ Jesus. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Second, as you see your true condition as a sinner saved by grace, you don't justify your sin, calling it a condition or something you were born with. You see your sin for what it really is, and it breaks your heart, and you mourn over your sin and sinful nature. But, in your mourning, you don't wallow in your sin. You are comforted in the reality that by God's grace through faith in Christ you have been justified by the imputed righteousness of Christ. You have been adopted into God's family and inherited the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

Third, understanding that you are not saved by your merit but by God's grace, and understanding that you have been saved in Christ from the sin for which you mourn, you become one who is characterized by meekness, walking humbly in the profound provision of our Lord. In meekness, like Abraham, you look forward to "the city that has

foundations, whose designer and builder is God” (Heb. 11:10). In meekness, like Moses, you consider “the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt” (Heb. 11:26). In meekness, like Christ, “who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:6-8). “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” Fourth, crave righteousness.

### **Crave Righteousness**

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” The Christian can *never* be spiritually satisfied on sin, because he has received the righteousness of Christ. The Apostle Paul explains, “Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 5:18–21). Paul goes on to say, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:1–2). If you are in Christ, you have been justified in His eternal righteousness and indwelt by His Holy Spirit. How then could you crave anything other than righteousness?

In Christ, you are in a state or condition of God’s gracious favor. Or, as Jesus says, you are “blessed.” In Christ, you begin to hunger and thirst for righteousness. Such craving, like a newborn baby craves her mother’s milk, reveals our true identity in Christ. While the world screams in your ear that sin defines you. The Spirit of Christ reveals that, as a child of God, righteousness defines you. Such craving, leads to being satisfied according to God’s Word. The Apostle Peter admonishes the Church, “Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good” (1 Pet. 2:2–3). As we mature in our salvation, as we grow in God’s grace, we find our taste buds changing. In our craving, we find that we enjoy righteousness.

### **Enjoy Righteousness**

When was the last time you heard someone encourage you to enjoy righteousness? Have you ever been encouraged to enjoy righteousness? Don’t you see how pervasive the lies of the world, the flesh, and the devil are? We have been indoctrinated to associate enjoyment with sin, not righteousness. Righteousness is portrayed as a burden to bear not a pleasure to enjoy. Yet, the psalmist sings to God, “You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Ps. 16:11). Do you desire a satisfying life of joy and not temporal but eternal pleasures? It is not to be found in the counsel of the wicked or the way of sinners

or the seat of scoffers. It is found in delighting in God's Word, meditating on it day and night (Ps. 1:1-2), and living according to it.

The beautiful thing about enjoying righteousness is that it is soul-satisfying: "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, Paul wrote to the Romans, but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17). For our famished and thirsty souls we hear our Savior say, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). The craving of your soul and mine can only be satisfied in Christ and His righteousness. This is a picture of Christian sanctification: We crave righteousness and are satisfied in Christ, which leads to a greater craving for righteousness and satisfaction. Even in trials, we consider it joy because we are being consistently satisfied in Christ and His righteousness.

So great is this satisfaction that we desire this joy for others. Why do we pray to our Heavenly Father, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10)? It is not because there is a shortage of righteousness in heaven! We desire righteousness for the souls of others, because they too are craving spiritual satisfaction, but apart from Christ they are starving and thirsting continually. Evangelism is sharing the gospel that others may enjoy righteousness! So, we crave righteousness, enjoy righteousness to ourselves and others, and in turn show mercy.

### **Show Mercy**

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." There is a direct correlation between understanding the mercy we have received from God in Christ and the mercy that we show to others. This does not mean that we procure God's mercy by showing mercy, as if we must merit God's mercy. Rather, showing mercy is a testimony to the mercy that God has shown us in Christ. In short, a Christian is characterized by mercy.

Jesus teaches this brilliantly in His parable of the unmerciful servant:

*the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.' So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. 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*

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*had mercy on you?’ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart (Matt. 18:21–35).*

If you are in Christ, your sin debt has been paid. You have not only been freed from the eternal judgment of that debt but you have also received an eternal inheritance. You have spiritually and eternally experienced the mercy and grace of God. This is the gospel.

Likewise, we demonstrate the evidence of this gospel when we extend mercy to others. You may know your Reformed Theology and have the catechisms memorized, but if your life is not characterized by mercy, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 4:17). You may read your Bible and pray daily, serve in church ministry, and share the gospel, but if your life is not characterized by mercy, call upon the Lord and you will be saved (Rom. 10:13). If you are in Christ, “Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:36).

Ps. 34:18 says, “The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.” We are often crushed by the circumstances of life and more often by our own sin. Yet, our Lord, who is rich in mercy, loves us. He is near to us always and forever. We show mercy because we have been mercifully forgiven.

God’s grace is His unmerited love to the *undeserving*. God’s mercy is His unmerited love to the *helpless*. Apart from Christ we were underserving and helpless. “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved” (Eph. 2:4-5). Because by God’s grace you have been saved, you will crave righteousness and your hunger and thirst will be satisfied in nothing else this world has to offer. Because by God’s mercy you have been saved, show mercy. For, in Christ we are righteously satisfied and mercifully forgiven.