

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Taught by Bruce Bickel

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Gracious Heavenly Father, can it be that you would die for a sinner such as me? Hallelujah, the answer is yes. Father, we so grateful for your mercy, your compassion, your kindness to us in spite of us, so grateful that you do not treat us as our sins deserve, and that you offer us an East/West forgiveness. Father, the one thing that evil cannot stand is forgiveness, and we thank you that we are forgiven sinners—still sinners, but we're forgiven. Father, we pray that you would open our eyes once again that we might behold wonderful things from your Word. Give us the vision of who you are for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Continuing our study of the Sermon on the Mount, looking at the Beatitudes in Matthew 5; Jesus' first staff meeting he gave these instructions. He gave the characteristics of a person who enters the kingdom of God and the characteristics of a person who lives a kingdom citizen life. That's what we're beginning to look at in the Beatitudes, taking each one of these separately.

Today, we're going to be looking at the transformation, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." (Matthew 5:6) We need to understand this as we do every week in the context of the ones right before it. Remember in our study of science of biblical interpretation, we want to have a very rigid and consistent hermeneutic, which is the science of biblical interpretation. That means we need to understand the historical background of the text which we're looking at. We need to understand the grammar, the verb tenses, the word usage, what do they mean, and then thirdly, we need to understand where does it fit in its context with the other verses in the chapter in the whole Bible itself.

Let me just explain one thing about why it's so important to have a solid, consistent hermeneutic. It's a great protection for us. The danger is to have truth become relative. Well it's what it means to you is okay to you and what it means to me is okay to me. Unfortunately, when you have that attitude, you miss a lot. In my judgment, the church in America is missing a lot, and here's how it works.

When you miss the truth, when you miss the Scripture, you miss the Son, and when you miss the Son, you miss the truth. The danger is in not having a consistent hermeneutic, you're missing the Scripture because Scripture no longer becomes your authority; you become your own authority. That's why it's so important that we understand when we take a look a verse such as this one, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied," we need to understand that in the context of the other verses.

Let me just read those for you, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:3) We saw that a couple of weeks ago, that this means that I recognize my spiritual bankruptcy. I have no spiritual resources that will cause God to do anything. I'm a spiritual beggar. I'm bankrupt. Therefore, I come to him and I begin to trust him. When you recognize you have no spiritual resources, that is what draws us to the Savior. That's the first key that God takes your heart of stone and replaces it with a heart of flesh. He breathes the Holy Spirit into you, and all of a sudden, you have a different view of who God is and you see yourself more clearly.

When you do not have Scripture be your standard, then you miss a description of the Son. When you miss the description of the biblical revelation of the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, then we miss the whole truth in itself.

Then we went to, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." (Matthew 5:4) After you

understand what that means to be a spiritual beggar, you now mourn over the condition of your sinfulness. You realize that your life has been, and is, an offense to God, and apart from his grace and mercy, you're committing cosmic treason, and you mourn over that. It's in that mourning that you're comforted because you realize that in the presence of evil, forgiveness is to one that that evil cannot stand. As you go from being poor in spirit, realizing your spiritual bankruptcy, you now mourn over your sin. It's in that process that you receive the comfort of God's grace, God's compassion and God's mercy.

Then we go to, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." (Matthew 5:5) Meekness is living according to the power of God under control. You realize that you do not have the spiritual resources, you mourn over your condition of sin, you quit relying upon your own resources as a means of living the Christian life, and now you begin to trust God and live a life of power under control. You realize this—that there's always a choice that I can make. What is the basis of my choice? It's the sufficiency of Scripture.

As we saw in the illustration of Jesus the night that he was taken captive, he said to the Roman soldiers and the religious leaders who were taking him prisoner, "Don't you know that I can call down 144,000 angels? But if I did that, how would the Scriptures be fulfilled?" The real key there is that little word "but." He says, "I can do this, but I'm not going to do that, because my standard is the Scripture be fulfilled." You see, don't miss the Scripture. When you miss the Scripture, you miss the Son, and when you miss the Son, you miss the truth.

Meekness is realizing this. I'm poor in spirit and I'm a spiritual beggar. I mourn over the condition of my sin. I'm comforted by God's grace and mercy and compassion. I quit trying to live the Christian life under my own resources. I now live it according to the grace of God. Not only are we saved by grace, but we're maintained by grace. So I live now according to the power of God. I'm trusting him to give me the resources of my life, that I don't have myself. Sometimes, you know, when you need to forgive somebody, you just have to admit, "Lord, I don't want to forgive them, but will you do that forgiveness for me? Give me to grace to do that." It's power under control.

As we come to this Beatitude, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness" (Matthew 5:6), it really begins to change the way that we look at the way that we live our lives. When we talk about righteousness, righteousness means right-wisdom. It means worship rightly divided, worship is the basis of our decision making. It means right-wisdom. It means making the right decisions.

Now that doesn't mean that you and I need to live a sinlessly perfect and perfectly obedient life. We can't do that. We already know that because of our spiritual bankruptcy that Christ is the only one that can do that. We get credit for his sinless perfection and his perfect obedience. As Romans 5:1 tells us, "Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God," as we're standing in his grace. We're not moving in and out of grace; we're standing in his grace.

There can be no peace of God without the peace with God. It's when we are justified by faith, when God gives us credit for his sinless perfection and perfect obedience, he declares us righteous, that's when you and I have peace with God. The peace of God, Philippians 4:7, which passes all understanding, is different than the peace with God. There is no peace of God unless you have peace with God. That's the real paucity of modern evangelism. We've overlooked that. We've basically said, "Do you need a friend? Then come to Jesus. Are you lonely? Then come to Jesus." We bypass the whole thing that your life as an offense to God and peace must be made. How is that peace made? It's been made by the cross.

The real point of evangelism is the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the person and work of Christ and repentance and faith. This idea of hungering and thirsting for righteousness is not the righteousness

that we're credited to when we're just justified by faith. That is the righteousness that is found solely in the person and work of Christ. The righteousness that we have now as an expression of what we want to do is it means that a pattern of life that is in conformity to God's will. That's what we're hungering and thirsting for.

Do you realize you're spiritually bankrupt, you mourn over your sin, you're comforted, you realize you don't have the power to live the Christian life, you're trusting his resources and his grace, and now you have a deeper hunger to be conformed to the image of Christ. That's what we're talking about when we talk about this hungering and thirsting after righteousness. It literally means, in the secular world vernacular, it means you become your own reward system. In other words, you're not looking for rewards outside of that; you're looking at rewards inside of yourself.

You become your own reward system. That means that you hunger and thirst for righteousness, you desire to live more of a godly life, you desire to be found in God's will, and that's your desire, and when you realize that you are, that's your comfort and that's when you're satisfied. You're satisfied by the fact that you're desiring to be more conformed to the image of Christ. Yes, you have been justified by faith. You now have peace with God. You can now have the peace of God. The peace of God comes when you realize that you have this hunger and desire to be conformed to the image of Christ and express the righteousness that was credited to you. You now begin to live that out in the formalities of your own life and the decisions you make.

You're satisfaction is this. Sometimes your only defense for making a decision is it's the right thing to do. You just do it because it's the right thing to do. That requires boldness. There's a degree of boldness in hungering and thirsting after righteousness. Boldness is realizing I'm going to make the right decision regardless of present opposition because I know there will be eternal consequences. In other words, you do the right thing now in spite of present consequences, or present reaction, because you know down the road it's going to bring ultimate victory. That's boldness. There's a degree of boldness in hungering and thirsting after righteousness because the desire is to do the right thing. Now realizing there's no merit—understand that—there's no merit in our doing anything right. The merit is given to us in who?

Audience Members: Christ.

In the person and work of Christ. You've already got that. Now what we're trying to do is to be become more conformed to the image of Christ, to become more righteous in the way that we express our Christian faith. The idea is how do I, am I found in God's will?

Let me explain it another way. We spend an awful lot of time trying to figure out what is God's will. In other words, what job should I take? I want God's will. What car should I buy? What house should I buy? We're always looking for to an "it." What is it? The idea is, sometimes you've heard people say, "I just want God's best." Now what does that silently imply? That God can give you a...second best. That's an offense to God. Whatever God does is always his best. That's because he's holy. You see, there's no such thing as good, better, better, or best. Whatever God does is the best because that's who he is by definition.

You're not looking for God's best. That means you're going to settle for something less. You're creating a God of your own human imagination, not the god of biblical revelation. The God of biblical revelation is holy, which means absolutely perfect. That means whatever he does is the best thing for us. That's where we understand that we submit to his sovereignty. The sovereignty of God means this. That God has the right to rule. That includes ruling my life. That means this—whatever God permits in my life is for his glory and my good.

You can't act like that unless you think like that. That's hungering and thirsting after righteousness. It's the idea that says I'm going to submit to the sovereignty of God and realize that he's going to run my life better than I do, and whatever he permits in my life, I may not understand, but I'm going to accept that, I'm going to submit to that, because I know this. God is sovereign and whatever he permits in my life is for his glory and my good. That requires a degree of boldness. That requires a degree of being meek. It requires a degree of being, living under the power of God. Power under control. That is absolutely against human nature. Our human nature says, "I want to make the decisions. I want to control my life." What we're understanding Jesus is saying is this. If you want to be a kingdom citizen, you first of all have to realize you don't have the resources for it. Second, you've got to mourn over your sin and be comforted. Thirdly, you've got to realize that there's another power source for you to live by, and it's not your own. It's not the resources of your own life; it's the resources of my life. That's power under control. When you hunger and thirst for that, that's what's going to be your satisfaction. Your satisfaction is going to be in the hungering, desiring to express the relationship that you have with Christ, and to be more conformed to his image.

In Deuteronomy 29:29, we're told, "The secret things belong to God." The things that are revealed are for our benefit and for our children, for future generations. We spend an awful lot of time, brothers, trying to find what it is. What is God's will? I want to find out God's will. When you hunger and thirst for righteousness, there's a shift. You're not trying to find it out; you're want to be found in it. That's what hungering and thirsting for righteousness is. I want to be found in God's will in this situation. There's a difference between happiness and blessedness. Happiness is the result of happenings. Blessedness is the result of God's grace.

We're saying, "I want to be happy." You look around the circumstances. What Jesus is saying here in the Beatitudes is when you hunger and thirst for righteousness, your desire really is not to find it out; it's really to find am I in it right now in this situation in my life because that's my satisfaction is the realization that I am in his will, not trying to find it out.

As you're looking for a job, the real issue is not do I find a job. The issue is am I found in his will while I'm looking for that job. That's the issue. That's hungering and thirsting for righteousness, because you want not to be expressive of the righteousness that God has given you.

The Scripture makes it very clear, and there's always a danger when you try to simplify things, especially when you talk about the subject of God's will. Well I just tried to do that a little bit to give us a handle, to understand what it means to hunger and thirst, to be in God's will. That's what it means to be hungering and thirsting after righteousness. I want to be found in God's will every moment of my life. When I'm in this situation, I want to be found in his will. When I'm in that situation, I want to be found in his will. When I'm at the office, I want to be found in his will. You see, that's the hunger and thirst for righteousness that the person who understands these Beatitudes really begins to think like that. When you begin to think that way, that becomes your satisfaction. Your satisfaction is the realization that yes, in this difficult situation, through God's grace, I'm responding in God's will. That's your satisfaction. That's your reward.

You see, essentially, we become our own reward system. Now I need to be careful when I say that. It doesn't mean that it's full of merit. What I'm saying is your motivation and your satisfaction is internal, not external. That's what I mean. You have an internal satisfaction of God's grace saying, "Yes, you are in my will," and that's where your confirmation and your joy and your satisfaction comes. It's not looking for a reward outside.

That means that you and I are motivated internally as much as we are externally. I'm not saying there's nothing wrong to be motivated externally to pursue excellence. I'm not saying that. All I'm saying is

understanding the kingdom citizen life is this. You're motivated internally, and the joy and the satisfaction comes when I realize, "Yes, I'm in his will, even in this difficult situation," because of my response.

Remember the illustration that we gave last week about meekness? Peter and Jesus were confronted to this same identical situation. Jesus was being taken captive. We know from John 18 that the one who drew his sword and cut off the ear of the high priest was Peter. Essentially, they came to the same situation. Peter saw Jesus being taken captive. Jesus saw himself being taken captive. Same situation, but two responses. Great lesson there for us. What was Peter doing before that situation occurred? He was asleep. What was Jesus doing before that situation occurred?

Audience Members: Praying.

Praying. Prayer is preparation for the right response. That's hungering and thirsting after righteousness. You're going to be found in his will. What does Jesus say? "Put your sword down, Peter. He who lives by the sword dies by it. Don't you know I've got another option? I can call down 144,000 angels—12 legions of angels. But I'm not going to do that." You see, that's the hungering and thirsting for righteousness example because you desire to be found in God's will. He didn't miss the Scripture, because he said this, "How would the Scripture be fulfilled?" You see, that's the thing that Jesus didn't miss. In his humanity, he didn't miss the Scripture as his authority. He said, "Yes, I can call down 144,000 angels, but I'm not going to do that because the Scripture says this—this is what has to happen." That's understanding the sovereignty of God.

What we would say was a weakness, defeat, that he turned himself over and he didn't resist and fight was actually an expression of his weakness—living under power under control. He chose the response that fulfilled the Scripture. That's what it means to hunger and thirst after righteousness. You and I try to put ourselves in a position to be found in God's will so that moment by moment, to the best of my ability, trusting God and all of the resources of his life, power under control, I try to make those decisions that are consistent with the Scripture. When you don't, what do you do?

Audience Member: Confess it.

Confess it. Exactly. Now, the two ways you're going to feel guilty. One because you are, and secondly because you choose to feel guilty. Those are the two reasons you're guilty. Now when you know you are, what do you do? You confess it. We confess our sins; he is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us of all unrighteousness. What's he cleanse us from? Poor decision making in the future. That's what he cleanses us from. He not only forgives us for that act, but he also cleanses us from all unrighteousness. That means he puts you back in the position to want to hunger and thirst for righteousness because of the cleansing of your forgiveness. When you are guilty, you ask his forgiveness.

One of my spiritual mentors from Scotland, who I studied with years ago, taught me a wonderful lesson about forgiveness. He said, "Bruce, whenever you ask the Lord to forgive you, the chain of your sin is broken. It's over. It was paid for. Just don't resurrect it again." Now that's the hard part. The easier part was "Lord, forgive me. There I did it again. Lord, just give me the grace." You see the other part of that verse is, "cleanses us of all unrighteousness." He wants to cleanse us of the desire to want to do it again. That's the desire to be hungering and thirsting after righteousness.

The other side of that coin—not only do we rejoice in our forgiveness, but we also need to rejoice in the fact that he's removed that tendency to want to do that. You and I just now need to not resurrect it. We need to avoid those things that are going to cause us to resurrect that same sin. Normally that comes

through the senses, doesn't it? Eyes, ears, tongue.

Don: That's the challenge I guess...

Absolutely.

Don: That's the real difficult challenge, particularly when we're bombarded with the media that goes in the opposite direction.

Absolutely, Don.

Don: But not only that, I mean, I find myself struggling with sins of thought. I don't need the media to...that's what....whatever kind of sin category you want talk about [UNCLEAR]...

You mean you have rotten thoughts? {LAUGHTER} None of the rest of us do. My goodness! Absolutely right. So many times in my life...I woke up in the middle of the night last night. I had to go to the bathroom. I couldn't get back to sleep. It was 2:45. I looked at the watch. I couldn't get back to sleep because of what was going on in my mind. I had to say, "Lord, remove those thoughts, because if you don't remove those thoughts, and I pursue them and I feed them and I nurture them, it's going to be a disaster. Not only am I not going to be able go to sleep, but it's going to affect me the whole day tomorrow. Lord, will you, out of your mercy and grace, will you remove those thoughts."

You see, Don's absolutely right. That's the real battleground. There's great comfort in 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." But the other part is just equally as powerful or maybe even more so, "and to cleanse of us all unrighteousness." You see, the righteousness that Jesus is talking about is the desire to live out a closer relationship to him. You've been cleansed from that tendency not to want to do that.

As my mentor, Eric Alexander said, "Don't feed that." You see, the chain of sin has been broken when you confessed it because it was paid for at the cross. The thing now is to pursue righteousness by not feeding that again. Avoid those things that are going to stimulate that.

Don is absolutely right. One of the greatest deterrents we have is our media because of the things that they feed us. If you want to read a great book about that, Ravi Zacharias' book, "Why Jesus" really does a wonderful job in describing the effect of mass media marketing upon Christianity in America. It's really an excellent, excellent study on that whole issue of how that happens.

Audience Member: I heard a great quote yesterday. We feed that which kills us and starve that which saves us, so we become all of these negative thoughts. [UNCLEAR] what's happened in the past and strive on toward what's ahead [UNCLEAR] heaven. If we stop dwelling on that negative, all of our failures, and just look at Christ, what he always tells us, [UNCLEAR] can be a heck of a lot [UNCLEAR].

That's the real issue about pursuing righteousness. A hungering and thirsting. You have a hunger and thirst to do that. Now realize that we're never going to achieve it. If you don't aim for the eagle, you never hit it. One of the things we have to achieve and really strive for is hungering and thirsting for righteousness—realizing in our own strength we can't achieve it and God is gracious in the way he treats us. He forgives us of our sins and cleanses us of all unrighteousness. He'll put us back in a position not to resurrect those same things.

But guys, it's a battle. It's a fight. It is really a fight. It's a battle of the mind. "Lord, you've got to

remove those thoughts.” I must say that 500 times a day, because I know this. If I let that go and I don’t deal with that at that moment, take it on as a battle, boy, it’s going to control me. Until the Lord is pleased to take me home, I’m in an unredeemed body. Right now, we’re in our sanctification mode. We’re free from the power of sin, but we’re not free from the presence of sin.

***Audience Member:** There’s a story...I don’t think I’ve told it before...about an old Indian who said he felt like he had two dogs fighting within. How do you know which one is winning? He said, “The one I feed the most.”*

Yeah. That’s right. The one I feed the most. That’s the one that’s winning. Robert E. Lee made a wonderful statement, if I can resurrect this correctly. He said we should not expect our troops, we should not expect ourselves, to be free from evil, but we should expect them not to be contaminated by it. Great statement. We shouldn’t expect us to be free from evil, but we should expect ourselves not to be contaminated by it. That’s hungering and thirsting after righteousness.

You see, we can’t remove ourselves from the evil of this world. We’re called to be in the world, but not of this world. You want a ship in the water; you don’t want any water in the ship. We are in the world. That’s our calling. But we’ve got to really fight and realize this. We should not let the world contaminate us. Another way of looking at it would be this. We should be able to look at the world and see the church, but we shouldn’t look at the church and see the world.

The problem with that statement is this. The church is missing something. What are they missing? They’re missing the sufficiency of Scripture. When you miss the sufficiency of Scripture as your standard, you miss the description of the biblical revelation of Jesus Christ the Lord as opposed to our human imagination of Christ, who we think he ought to be and what he should be doing.

When you miss the Jesus of biblical revelation, you miss the truth. What does he say, “I am the truth.” Truth is not relevant. Not relevancy. Truth is an absolute. It’s found in the person and work of Christ. If you miss the description of that in the Scriptures, you miss the sufficiency of Scripture, you miss the sufficiency of the Son. And if you miss the sufficiency of the Son, you miss the sufficiency of truth. It’s the truth that sets people free. It’s not perception. It’s when perception and reality meet and merge, cultures changes. That’s one of the great dangers, in my judgment, of reality shows. It’s when perception and reality merge that changes society. It’s because now I think, “Oh my perception of this, that’s reality,” it changes the way you think.

What Jesus is saying is this. Your reward is the hunger and thirst after righteousness. Right-wiseness—to make the right decision, to expression the fact that you’re a redeemed child of God.

Let me explain it this way. It might be helpful for us. Essentially, hungering and thirsting after righteousness means I want to be found every moment of my life, to the best of my ability with God’s grace sustaining me, God’s grace is sufficient...I want to be found in his will. What does that look like? Let me give you some illustrations. There are six verses that I would suggest that are God’s revealed description of God’s will for all of us. That would mean this, brothers—that God’s will for you is the same as God’s will for the guy sitting right beside you, and the guy behind you and the guy in front of you. God’s will for you is not different than somebody else. In fact, I would go as far as to say that God’s will is the same for every redeemed child of God. It’s all the same thing. We are the means by which God puts his life on display. That’s the purpose of our life.

If you want a description of the purpose-driven life, it’s found in Ezekiel 36, “I will demonstrate the fact that I’m holy when I demonstrate my holiness through you.” That’s our purpose in life. So we all have the same purpose. Your calling is different. Your calling is how do I live out my purpose. But whether

or not you're a barber, a school teacher, a farmer, a lawyer, a physician, a banker or retired, you all have the same purpose. Your calling is how to, in the environment in which you live that out.

The issue for pursuing righteousness and hungering and thirsting after righteousness is how do I find myself, am I in God's will? Let me give you some verses and let's spend our time going through this. First of all, I would offer for your consideration that God's revealed will would be these six things. First of all, that you're saved. That you have a saving relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, such verses as 1 Timothy 2:4, "God who desires all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth." That's a reference to the elect, not referring to everybody. It's to the elect. The reason that Lord Jesus has not come back in all of his glory is because all of his elect have not come to saving faith, because that's his will for them. Do you realize that? This verse is not talking about all of humanity. It's talking about the elect. You've got to look at the context of that particular passage in 1 Timothy. But here's the first thing. You've got to ask yourself the question, "Am I in his will? Do I have a saving relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ? Do I have a saving relationship with God the Father through God the Son?" That's the first expression of his will for you. That's the indication of your election, that your name was written in the Lamb's Book of Life before the foundation of the world. So the first thing is God's will is that you're saved.

Secondly, I'll also take you to 2 Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to reach repentance." Again, that's a reference to the elect. Not everybody in masses. It's to the elect. Look at the context and you'll understand it. It's talking to God's chosen people.

So the first question is this, "Am I saved?" If you are, then you know you're in his will in the midst of your life's situation. The second thing—spirit filled. Ephesians 5:17-18, "Therefore do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is, and do not get drunk with wine for that is debauchery, but be filled with the spirit." The word "filled" here does not mean a second experience after your conversation. This is not a post-conversion experience.

This is a moment by moment experience. Literally in the Greek text it's this—keep be being kept filled. In other words, you were baptized with the Holy Spirit. Now notice, the Holy Spirit doesn't baptize anybody. Jesus does the baptizing. You are immersed in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the ingredient in which you are immersed, in which you are baptized. But the Holy Spirit doesn't baptize anybody. Christ baptizes you with the spirit. You don't see baptized by the spirit; you're baptized with the spirit and Christ does the baptizing. That happens at your conversion when you're saved. 1 Corinthians 12, "We're baptized into one body." You are immersed into the body, and now that means this. Am I being led by the spirit? Being spirit filled means being led by the spirit moment by moment. I be being kept filled. You are filled at your conversion, now am I in the state of be being kept filled? That's what I mean to be filled. That's God's will, that you're being led by the spirit. Am I spirit led? Are you thinking that way? Are you asking the spirit to be your guide, your director, your counselor, your paraclite, to come along side you, to give you instructions, to help you? You see, you've got the power source. That's what it means to be spirit filled. That's the second thing of God's will. You think like that.

Thirdly (ringing phone in background)...that's a point of emphasis. {LAUGHTER} Thirdly, are you sanctified? Sanctified means set apart to be holy. 1 Thessalonians 4:3, "For this is the will of God." You want to know what God's will is? Right here it is. "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality." Are you in it? Are you found in God's will? It's not about your job. It's about your condition of who you are. It's about your hungering and thirsting for righteousness.

So are you saved? Are you spirit led? Are you sanctified? That is God's will for you. In other words, do

you understand that you've been set apart for holiness? Do you understand you've been set apart to be the means by which God's going to demonstrate the fact that he's holy? To fulfill your purpose? That's sanctification. It's something God does in you. It's not something that you do. It's something that he works in you. As a result of that is you have a different style of life because you're hungering and thirsting after righteousness. God is the one who accomplishes salvation. He's the one who accomplishes your sanctification because he does that. That's his role as a result of our being spirit led.

Next, submissive. We're saved, we're spirit filled, we're sanctified, we're submissive. 1 Peter 2:13-15, ¹³“Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, ¹⁴or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. ¹⁵For this is the will of God.” You see, every one of these phrases I'm giving you has the expression, “this is the will of God.” It's rather obvious it's the will of God. ¹⁵“For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.”

It means in the midst of this...in the midst of submitting to the authority of which you are now under, the priority is to do good while you're submitting. That's God's will. It has nothing to do with the condition of the person you're submitting to. The issue is am I doing good things, am I doing good deeds in the midst of my submitting to the authority of which I find myself? That's God's will for you, for me. Go to work. You submit to somebody. Do good things. You're in God's will, regardless of the relationship you have with your boss. The issue is not is she right or wrong, or are you right or wrong; the issue is am I doing good while I'm submitting to him or her? That radically changes everything when you go to work.

How about Ephesians 5:21, “submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.” Part of our commitment to the body of Christ. Then Luke 9:23, “And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” That's submission.

Now notice, three characteristics there, of a disciple. Somebody will ask you, “What's a disciple of Christ?” take them to Luke 9:23. This is what Jesus says a disciple is, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself.” Self-denial. Characteristic number one of a disciple of Christ is self-denial. Take up your cross. Self-sacrifice—the second characteristic of a disciple. Self-sacrifice. And thirdly, follow me—self-submission. You know what a definition of a follower of Christ is? One who self-denies, self-sacrifices and self-submits. That's God's will for your life. Scripture makes it very clear, it's God's will.

So saved, spirit filled, sanctified, submissive. Next, suffering. 2 Timothy 3:12, “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” 1 Peter 4:9, “Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will.” What do we say in evangelism? Are you suffering? Come to Jesus. You might be suffering because you are in Christ. You see the difference? It may be. It may be. “Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.” You see, brothers, the issue is this. In the midst of my suffering, am I doing good? That's God's will. Not why am I suffering. But in the midst of my suffering am I doing good? That's God's will.

1 Peter 3:17, “For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.” How do you respond when you're suffering? You see, God's will is this. While you're suffering, do good. That's power under control. That's meekness. That is against human nature. There's no way in the world you can do that in your human strength. That's a function of God's supreme sovereign grace. You can't do that in your own humanity. That's something that is supernatural. The things that I'm giving you, guys, here are supernatural responses as a function of God's grace. These are not things that you can say, “I think I can. I think I can. I think I can.” You go to Andrew Carnegie and get a positive mental attitude drill. That's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about something that's outside this world. It's supernatural. It's grace.

The contrast here is why am I suffering? Don't worry about why you're suffering? The issue is how am I suffering? Am I doing good while I'm suffering?

I'm thinking of an illustration. Remember the movie Chariots of Fire? Eric little, good Scotsman. How he would not run in the Olympics on the Lord's Day? Later on, he was a missionary in China, and he was taken captive. He was put in prison. He suffered immensely. While he was captured as a prisoner in a Chinese prison camp, there were those who were less physically strong than himself. He gave them his portions of food so that they would live. He eventually died of starvation. In the midst of evil, he was right in the middle of God's will, because he was doing good. The issue is not why am I suffering; the issue is how am I responding to my suffering. That's God's will. Do you see that? It's not about happenings. It's about being blessed.

And then one more. Saying thanks. 1 Thessalonians 5:18, "Give thanks in all circumstances for this is..." a good idea. No. This is God's will, "for this is the will of God in Christ for you." In the midst of your suffering, what's your response? "Eh eh he...why me?" No. "Lord, I don't know what you're doing, but I thank you. Give me the grace to response accordingly, because I want to be found...in this situation, I want to be found in your will." That's hungering and thirsting after righteousness.

Brothers, when Jesus says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness," he's essentially saying this, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst to be found in my will, to be saved, to be spirit filled, to be sanctified, to be submissive, to be suffering, and to be saying thanks." Blessed...because they're the ones who are going to be satisfied, because they're going to find them have in God's will.

Don: Bruce, is pouring my heart out to God, expressing my, in the midst of suffering, let's say, terrible pain or whatever, is pouring my heart out to God, in tears, and saying thanks at the same time mutually exclusive?

They can be done at the same time. Pouring your...

Don: I just don't...

Pouring your heart out to God, in your pain, is part of your submissiveness to his sovereignty. In other words, "Lord, I don't know what this is about..., but here's what I'm feeling." There's nothing wrong with that. We're told in the Scripture to make all of our supplications known to God with all thanksgiving. We have the freedom to do that. At the same time, as you're doing that, we have this hunger and thirst that we would have the right response in the midst of my pain. Those two things, in my judgment, go together. They're both equally valid, because I have the freedom to express my pain to God. At the same time, I'm saying, "Lord, now in the midst of my pain, which I've just given you, will you have me the grace to have a response that I will be found in your will." It's not an either/or in my judgment; it's a both/and.

Audience Member: I think the easy thing to do is when you're going through that pain, pouring your heart out to God, and blaming him for it, that's the easy thing...

That's right. That's right.

Audience Member: [UNCLEAR] we can thank him for it.

Yes please.

Audience Member: *One thing I find difficult is when you are in pain, you wonder, if I pray to remove myself from this pain, it's quandary because is it, you know, God's will [UNCLEAR] and by asking the remove yourself, are you asking to remove yourself from God's will.*

That's a good question. That's a good question, isn't it? That's the reason why I'm saying don't ask the question why; ask the question how. How do I need to respond in my pain, because, "I understand that this might be part, might be your will for me. Give me the right response." That's a very good question. If you ask to have it be removed...

Let me just, you know, a crass illustration. Years ago, I was invited to be on a TV show, a local TV station, Christian station. After I finished the interview, the guy came up and said, "You look like you're in pain." I said, "Yes, I am." He said, "Well God doesn't want you to be in pain." I said, "Really?" He said, "Yes, God's will is for you to be pain free. Can we pray for you?" I said, "No thanks." He said, "Why is that?" I said, "Because pain, for me, is a constant reminder of God's mercy that he spared my life. I've got a trophy of grace every time I get out of a chair and every time I bend over. It's just a reminder of God's grace to me that "I spared your life in Vietnam." So I said, "No, don't remove the pain, because I need that. It's part of God's will for me, to create within me a spirit of gratitude and attitude. And so for me, no, don't pray for that removal." Well they thought I was out of fellowship or something. {LAUGHTER}

But that's a very good question. We have to be careful. We don't get everything right all the time. Please understand, I'm not saying you get everything right. All I'm saying, guys, is that when you hunger and thirst after righteousness, you want to be found in his will. That's something that you and I have to work out individually. I can't give you a prescription for what that looks like. I just tried to give you some handles from the Scripture to help us understand what it means to be found in his will. You have to work that out with the grace of God through the Holy Spirit, because I can't be your Holy Spirit. I can't be your Holy Spirit.

Audience Member: *[UNCLEAR]...I heard a Rabbi explain once that the concept of prayer was not to ask for things or desires. He said the only thing you can ask for is strength. To me, it made a lot of sense because otherwise, if we pray based on [UNCLEAR], what's the explanation for that. [UNCLEAR]... I'm curious as to what your thoughts would be on that. It makes sense to me to say [UNCLEAR]...*

No, as the Scripture says, "make all of your supplications known to the Lord," whatever they are. We have great freedom in our relationship as a saved child of God to have that relationship with Abba Father.

I will say this. The way that I would answer that question is this. Whatever you pray for, it's going to be answered. Always going to be answered in one of two ways. Provide or protect. God's either going to provide it for you or protect you from it by not giving it to you. Whatever you pray—strength or anything else, win the lottery—if you don't get it, God protected you. It was an answer to prayer. Whatever you do pray, it's always answered in one of two ways. God either provides it for you because he knows that it is best for you in his sovereignty, or he protects you from it and doesn't give it to you because he knows in his sovereignty it's best for you and his glory. Either way, every prayer you have is going to be answered either by provision or protection.

Audience Member: *[UNCLEAR] mentioned that announcer thinking you were out of fellowship just rang a bell with me thinking how far off of Scripture most of our American preachers are and they think [UNCLEAR] you are in fellowship through Philippians 3:10. [UNCLEAR]...*

Well, guys, I hope we get some understanding of what it means to be hungering and thirsting after righteousness. It means a desire to be found in conformity with God's will. That's literally what it means. When you find yourself in that condition, that's when you're satisfied. You become your own reward system. It's an internal reward.

***Audience Member:** Just one comment on that, we were talking about being in God's and someone back here was talking about [UNCLEAR] tribulations, testings, to me, are all Red Sea experiences. The Hebrew children were in the will of God. I'm sure they didn't want to be in the midst of a wall of water. He took them through it. He didn't take them out of it. When we get to that point and say, "Lord," like you said, "what is your will for what is going on in my life right now," whether it's good, bad or indifferent as far as we're concerned, [UNCLEAR] free will in your life, and he'll take you through it.*

Self-denial, self-sacrifice, self-submission. That's Jesus' definition of a follower of himself, "If anyone wants to come after me..." You've got to learn those three character qualities—self-denial, self-sacrifice, self-submission. May God give us the grace, brothers, to pursue that with bigger, and to hunger and thirst for that, because therein will we be satisfied. Let's pray.

Father, once again, you've been so gracious to us. Father, I would ask that if I've said, or we've said, anything that's inconsistent with your revealed will as contained in the sufficiency of Scripture, we don't want to miss that, and if we have missed something because we have misspoken something, then remove that from us. May we remember only those things that are from your Spirit. We know that his job description is to guide us into all truth. May it be so that we will pursue that for Jesus' sake. Don't let us miss the Scripture, because we don't want to miss the Son, because we don't want to miss the Truth. And all the brothers said...Amen!!