

**SERMON BY REV W HUIZINGA
ON
MATTHEW 5:6**

LITURGY

Votum and Salutation

Psalm 43:5

The Ten Words of the Covenant

Psalm 43:3,4

Prayer of Thanks and Prayer for the Opening of God's Word

Thankoffering

Psalm 119:39,40

Read - Matthew 5:13-26 and Luke 18:1-8

Text - Matthew 5:6

Sermon

**BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST
FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS**

- 1. Hunger and thirst for righteousness.*
- 2. You shall be filled.*

Psalm 42:1,5

Pastoral Prayer

Psalm 119:49,50

Benediction

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Get justice for me! That was the cry of the widow in Jesus' parable.

Do we not hear the same constant cry in this sin-riddled world? The oppressed masses in Serbia want justice at the international court in The Hague, The Netherlands, for the atrocities committed against them.

Those who lost a daughter or son to a reckless, drunken driver want to see justice. Murderers must face the judge. Family members do not rest till they see justice done against criminals.

Citizens in countries like Zimbabwe seek justice. Instead they face an oppressive regime.

Justice or righteousness! How many do not seek it? Governments often pursue the path of justice, as long as it keeps them in power.

Jesus places righteousness high on his agenda as well. In his Sermon on the Mount our Teacher often refers to it. Indeed, he devotes a whole section of it to this subject.

Jesus wants righteousness to characterise us. To be more specific, Jesus wants the hunger and thirst for righteousness to characterise us.

I preach to you the Word of our Lord Jesus under this THEME:

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

- 1. Hunger and thirst for righteousness.***
- 2. You shall be filled.***

1. Hunger and thirst for righteousness.

This beatitude characterises all Christians, male and female. Jesus wants you all to fit this description. The citizens in his kingdom must *hunger and thirst for righteousness*.

Jesus already preached the need to be a *beggar in spirit*. In yourself you are spiritually bankrupt, a beggar with empty hands and pleading eyes.

As well, you must mourn and you must be meek.

All these descriptions, characteristics of citizens in God's kingdom, underline how needy we are, how we need God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now Jesus adds, *hunger and thirst for righteousness*.

Already in her song of jubilation, the virgin Mary sang how God *has filled the hungry with good things, but the rich God has sent away empty (Lk 1:53)*. This is the norm in God's kingdom.

Also in this Sermon on the Mount Jesus keeps addressed the need for righteousness. Does our Lord not insist that we must not pursue the daily clamour for what we shall eat or what we shall drink or what we shall wear for clothing. The pagans pursue this daily round of worries. Pagans pursue possessions. The ungodly seek wealth and property and happiness by amassing material things. You are to be different.

You, *seek the kingdom of heaven **and its righteousness***. As a matter of priority seek what pleases God, what is right in the eyes of the Lord. That means you need not worry about food and drink or clothing, for *all these daily needs will be added to you*, Jesus promises.

Righteousness! In the Bible we often meet that term. It has various aspects. We most often think of righteousness as **legal righteousness** – how God as Judge regards us in a legal way. What is our status before God? Does the Judge declare a guilty verdict against us or does He acquit us, promising us eternal life in Jesus Christ? Our Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Days 23 and 24 explain this legal righteousness. We find such righteousness only in our holy and righteous Saviour, Jesus Christ. The Jews, Paul tells us, tried to *establish their own righteousness and did not submit to God's righteousness* (Rom 10:4). Some think that Jesus refers to such righteousness here as well, but this is scarcely possible in the context of this Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus accents our need to keep the height, the depth and the width of God's commandments.

That brings us to the second aspect, **moral righteousness**. This stresses the righteousness of your character and conduct, which pleases God. In this Sermon on the Mount Jesus goes on to address the Jewish followers about the need to follow the commandments, as you heard them this morning. Righteous is the person who walks in the ways of the Lord, whose conduct follows the will of his God. Such a person loves the Lord, desires to follow all of God's precepts and teachings. You see, this term, *righteousness*, describes how a person has a right relation with God and with his neighbour. In the whole walk of life they adhere to the norms of God's covenant. God has entered a covenant with them. God signed and sealed it right at the start of their life when they were just a little baby. God promised to their God, to give them all his salvation. God also asked love and obedience from them. Now as this person grows up they value that covenant, that friendship with God. They want to please God and do nothing to offend Him.

Jesus sees the need to explain this and to enforce this godly style of life. You see, Jewish leaders changed the laws of God. They corrupted and changed them. Sometimes they even replaced the clear command of God with their own new laws. I think about *Corban*, giving gifts to God with the outcome that you cannot give honour and help to your father and mother as God's law demanded.

This is why Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount goes into detail about a number of the commandments – *you shall not kill, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not break your oath, and love your enemies*. For the Jews had explained them in such a way that they had no more teeth. God's commands became toothless! Jesus had to insist on the full, unadulterated law of God in the lives of his followers.

Oh yes, the Jews seemed very righteous in their lifestyle. But it was a superficial righteousness, only skin deep. As long as you did not outrightly murder, you kept the law, it was claimed. But Jesus says that if you bear a grudge, or if you hiss through your teeth *you fool* at your rival or enemy, you can be liable to the highest court of the land or even to the court of heaven! Jesus wants a righteousness that comes from the heart and percolates through your thoughts, your emotions as well as your deeds. That is why Jesus says, *unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven* (5:20).

As I said, this righteousness follows what God prescribes in his covenant with us. Does God not lay down rules how we must serve Him and how we must live with one another? Yes indeed! It is all summed up in the ten words of the covenant. In all of this we must become righteous as our Lord is fully righteous.

Righteousness thus sums up how we must live toward God and toward our neighbour. When we follow God's teachings then we are said to do what is right. We are righteous. The Jews stressed the duties toward God. They often neglected the duties toward their neighbour. Giving tithes of all they earned or purchased seemed high on their list of priorities. Showing mercy, kindness and loyalty to their neighbours, especially to their needy neighbours, seemed very low on their list of priorities. Jesus instils a social conscience as well, especially towards the poor, the widowed, the downcasts and the outcasts.

When God keeps to the terms of his covenant with us, then God is said to perform righteousness. That can include executing the curses of his covenant for unfaithfulness. Yes, because then God is righteous.

When God rescues his people from the clutches of the enemy, then too the prophets say that Israel is redeemed by righteousness. God promised to help and to save them whenever they called on Him in their time of need.

You see, righteousness is a term that belongs in a fellowship, a friendship. When you true friends remember each other, come to help each other, and stand up for each other, you are true and right. This is righteousness.

Jesus wants you to follow God's commandments. But please remember that this is not to be a superficial or outward or mechanical eye-service only. Jesus warns his followers in this Sermon on the Mount:

*Be careful not to do **your acts of righteousness** before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven (6:1).*

Jews prayed, fasted or gave gifts to the poor in order to receive praise from others. They made sure that everyone saw them. As it were they sounded their trumpets to announce their good deeds. *Look at me*, they shouted! They prayed on street-corners to allow all and everyone to hear their pious prayers. Others could learn from them. Jesus knew what lived inside the heart and minds of these spiritual show-offs. God hated their spiritual charades and parades before people.

That is not the righteousness Jesus asked from his followers. Jesus wants you to do it from the heart, fully convinced in your heart. You should not care whether anyone sees or hears you. You should delight in doing what is right, in what pleases God.

Yet today righteousness is often parodied as some form of obsolete prudishness from the Victorian age. Others see it as narrow-minded or even vehement legalism.

If people do speak of righteousness as some form of godliness, then often associate it with **decency or respectability**. As long as you follow what is politically correct all is approved. If you go to the pub and get drunk, that is all right as long as you do not drive yourself home and cause an accident. Take a taxi instead. Then you have enjoyed a sociable night out and done the right thing. You are respectable. That you got drunk and hung over the next morning is not mentioned. Or take the example of the politician whose wife accompanies him on his rounds of duty. They seem a nice couple. They give the right image in public. Photos of them in the papers picture them as an exemplary married couple. Yet on the side she hardly sees him. So she resorts to clandestine affairs. He too has his discreet affairs. How hypocritical! We learn to see through the thin veneer of their decency or respectability.

You can understand that Jesus would decry such a low, hypocritical lifestyle for his followers.

Even among Christians the pursuit of righteousness is not popular. One often hears of the pursuit of spiritual maturity or real happiness, or the power to witness effectively for the Lord. Some go from preacher to preacher or from convention to conference to seek some vague blessing from on high. Others seek an experience.

Jesus teaches us to practise the fellowship, the covenant, we have with the triune God, with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Follow what God says in his covenant. Pursue that and all the others things you need and want will follow. Concentrate on this essential characteristic.

How does Jesus insist on such a pure and true righteousness? Jesus uses some strong terms - ***hunger and thirst*** for righteousness. Unfortunately, we do not really get the point.

It is hard to get this across to us here in Australia where we do not know what it means to be hungry or thirsty. We have all that we need. We can visit the pantry cupboard, the bread-box to make ourselves a sandwich. In fact, a sandwich is too mundane, we want something tasty, something *lekker*. We look for some biscuits or cake. And if we want something to drink, a glass of water to quench our thirst is too mundane. We want something tasty – a glass of Coke for your younger persons.

You see, we develop taste-buds for what is special. Normal food and drink is not good enough any more.

Again, we really do not know what it means to be hungry or to thirst. Oh yes, if you are in the outdoors all day in the outback, with no conveniences, then that bottle of water tastes delicious. Oh yes, after walking kilometres through a gorge or up on to a high rock, then that simple meal of baked beans and bread toasted over fire tastes so good.

Many in this world understand what it means to *hunger and thirst*. They live from day to day, from meal to meal. Simple meals of rice with a few greens, along with a glass of water or maybe some tea and sugar suffices for the whole day.

Jesus tells you to be like the person who searches for his daily food and drink. His stomach is empty. He scours his veggie garden to see if there is anything left, but finds nothing. It is the hot season, no rains. He must wait till the rains return. He looks in the rain-barrel under the roof, but finds it is dry. So he travels many kilometres to a spring to get some water. He can only take as much as he can carry back over all those kilometres in the hot sun. He then has to scour the bush for roots and berries and anything edible. This person does this day after day. It is his prime task in life. He is hungry and thirsty. He *hungers and thirsts* after food and drink. That is the type of picture Jesus here draws for you.

Now in a similar way you are *hunger and thirst for righteousness*. You know you need this as much as you need food and drink. You need it daily. Without it you die. You seek it like a person who is absolutely dying of thirst and whose stomach grumbles with hunger.

This description shows it is an ongoing search. You never realise your pursuit in this life. Brothers and sisters, boys and girls, you know the roller-coaster ride we have in pursuing righteousness. Every day we need to pray, pray earnestly that the Holy Spirit will form Jesus in our life. Every day we need to pray that the Holy Spirit will give us the strength to resist sin. And still sin holds so much attraction for us. We cave in to the lusts of the flesh and to the desires of the heart. We need daily cleansing.

Yes, this spells daily conversion – dying daily unto sin by the power of the Spirit and rising daily by the power of the Spirit.

What do we seek? Righteousness! With a heartfelt joy in God through Christ it is our love and delight to live according to the will of God in all good works.

We *hunger and thirst for righteousness*. It means we daily feast on the Scriptures to allow the Spirit to work in us. We will use every opportunity to allow the Spirit to make us willing and ready from now on to live for Jesus.

We truly enjoy living life God's way. We delight in God through Christ. His fellowship with us makes us rich, makes us want to please Him.

Oh yes, we have only a small beginning. Nevertheless, with earnest purpose we do begin to live not only according to some but according to all the commandments of God.

When will we finally achieve full righteousness?

2. You shall be filled.

Blessed

This means more than to be happy, as we explained to you before. It means to be in a state of blessedness by God. No matter how cruel life here on earth is for you as a Christian, you know for sure that God blesses you. For does Jesus not say,

blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake...blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you (vss 10-12).

You are blessed by God. That makes you happy, no matter what state you find yourself in here on earth.

People who put righteousness first thus find the state of blessedness.

We mentioned in our introduction those who seek political justice and peace. It is an elusive goal. Jesus teaches us the way to reach it. Hunger and thirst for godly righteousness. Be a true citizen of the kingdom of heaven.

Such citizens become new people, people who delight in and pursue righteousness. That is the way to find true justice and peace in a country. All other means are superficial. Governments change structures such as schools and housing for all without regard to race, for instance. But do they change people? Do they make the citizens better and new? No! That is why their programs often fail to bring much change. They last only as a morning mist.

They shall be filled.

Yes, you who hunger and thirst after righteousness, you shall be filled.

Note the future tense. Why? Well, Jesus had not yet fulfilled all righteousness for us. All that the prophets foreshadowed still needed to be fulfilled. Jesus would go the way of sacrifice, of selfless sacrifice, on the cursed cross. All for us rebels. All for us trespassers of the law. The Holy Spirit will credit us with his righteousness.

But it is also in the future tense for another reason. Here on earth the Spirit indeed changes us. We become new in Christ and we delight in what pleases God. But it is only a small beginning, though it is a beginning over the whole spectrum of life. You see, the full change comes when Jesus comes in glory. Then we shall be changed fully and become fully righteous.

Note also that it is in the passive sense – shall **be** filled. God will make us completely new people. The Holy Spirit will transform us, and *make us willing and ready from now on to live for Jesus*. Also, we will be filled with a righteousness which is not our own. God will give it to us. Jesus will credit us with his own full and divine righteous life.

We will be **filled**. Those who suffer hunger and thirst now will one day enjoy a feast of righteousness. You may have attended a wedding feast where you could indulge yourself – a sumptuous meal with desserts, wedding cake, nibbles on the table along with wine. Afterward you suffered a troubled sleep because you overate.

On the new earth we will be changed from mortal to immortal, from persons still plagued by a sinful nature to persons ruled by the Spirit. God will fill us in the land filled with peace and righteousness.

How is this possible? Only through Jesus!

Jer 23:6 – *the LORD is our righteousness!*

1 Cor.1:30 – *Jesus is our wisdom from God, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption.*

2 Cor 5:21 – *God made Jesus who knew no sin to be sin, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*

This means you should seek righteousness through Jesus, and through his Holy Spirit. Do not try to seek it by yourself. You are stagnate lake with no inlet and no outlet. It stagnates, stinks and has become polluted. Seek the inlet or fresh water that Jesus supplies. The Holy Spirit will change you and make you new. The fruit of the Spirit will beautify your life. And the Holy Spirit will also make sure that the lake also has an outlet. Your righteousness will pour out deeds of thanks for God and flow with love for your neighbour.

Amen.