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Geoffrey D. Dunn

Report on MATS 2019:

Natural Theology

Maxon Mani

Peer Reviewed Articles

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Joseph Vnuk, OP

Journal of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools



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MELANESIAN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

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Editor:

Geoffrey D. Dunn, FAHA

University of Pretoria, South Africa, and John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland

Email: gdd62au@hotmail.com

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THE SEVEN ΔΙΚΑΙΟΣΥΝΗ-PASSAGES IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Jacklyn S. Nembai

Pacific Adventist University, Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea

Abstract

There are three main interpretations of what “righteousness” means in the Gospel of Matthew. Righteousness is: (1) a human response and responsibility; (2) God’s gift; and (3) both a human response and responsibility and God’s gift. The latter view is commonly accepted in recent scholarship. This paper will argue that righteousness in Matthew is not exclusively either a “demand” or a “gift.” Rather, it is a human responsibility in that a human response is required to God’s initiative and salvific activity. It will also be argued that human responsibility is explicit in Matthew, while God’s salvific activity is more implicit. In addition, it will be demonstrated that righteousness in Matthew is a distinguishing quality that describes the righteous disciples, who are considered to be and are treated as “outsiders” by the scribes and Pharisees and those who follow them, all of whom are portrayed as religious “insiders.” For Matthew, outsiders are always subject to persecution. The “greater righteousness” expected of the disciples is exemplified by the life of the prophets, in whose footsteps John the Baptist and Jesus walked. Finally, these findings will be discussed in relation to Christianity in Melanesia.

Key Words

Righteousness, Gospel of Matthew, obedience, insider-outsider, conversion

INTRODUCTION

This article examines the seven δικαιοσύνην or “righteousness” passages in the Gospel of Matthew (3:15; 5:6, 10, 20; 6:1, 33; and 21:32). The first section deals with righteousness in relation to Jesus and John the Baptist (3:15; 21:32). The second section deals with righteousness in the Sermon on the Mount, along with other related texts and relevant OT books, especially Malachi and Isaiah. It will be argued that Matthean righteousness is connected to a greater kind of righteousness, that is, righteous obedience based on a relationship with God. Like John and Jesus, the lives of righteous disciples are identified with the prophets of the OT and NT who were badly treated and persecuted as outsiders by the religious insiders. By way of definition, the term “outsider(s)” refers to the righteous disciples in Matthew,

both those who accompanied Jesus while he was alive, and those who will become followers after his death. The term “insider(s)” refers to those who are considered to be members of the Jewish religious community, particularly religious leaders who are the main perpetrators of persecution, but also ordinary people who submit to their leadership and persecute the righteous. The righteousness of the righteous outsider(s) is a greater kind of righteousness, an internalised righteousness, that goes beyond mere outward obedience.

RIGHTEOUSNESS: JOHN THE BAPTIST AND JESUS (MATT 3:15; AND 21:32)

Apart from the five δικαιοσύνη texts in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:6, 10, 20; 6:1 and 33), the remaining texts (Matt 3:15; and 21:32) are associated directly with John the Baptist and Jesus. The answer of Jesus to John’s question (πρέπον ἐστὶν ὑμῖν πληρῶσαι πᾶσαν δικαιοσύνην, “it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness”) of 3:15 and to question of the chief priests and elders concerning John (ἦλθεν ... ἐν ὁδοῦ δικαιοσύνης, “he came ... in the way of righteousness”) of 21:32 are loaded with meaning. As Davies and Allison rightly point out, to understand what these answers mean it first requires an understanding of John and his role in Matthew’s Gospel.¹ The teachings and role of the Matthean Jesus, in relation to righteousness and other themes of the gospel, also need to be correctly understood. This is because both Jesus and John came “to fulfil all righteousness” (3:15) and they both came “in the way of righteousness” (21:32). Although Jesus indirectly associates himself with John (21:32), he also declares that God has given him all authority on earth and in heaven (28:18–20). Thus, the best place to begin to understand the Matthean theology of righteousness, especially in relation to John, is Matt 21:32 and not Matt 3:15 or 17:10, which many scholars have claimed, are the two key passages for understanding John’s role.² Matthew 21:32 captures John and Jesus’ identity, authority, and mission. All of these are summarised in the phrase “he came in the way of righteousness.” Only when one understands who John and Jesus truly are,

¹ William D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (ICC; 3 vols.; Edinburgh: T & T Clack, 1988–97), 1.324.

² Morris M. Faierstein, “Why do the Scribes Say that Elijah Must Come First,” *JBL* 100 (1981): 75–86, at 75.

and what their mission entails, will one understand what “to fulfil all righteousness” means.

Coming “in the Way of Righteousness” (Matt 21:32)

ἦλθεν γὰρ Ἰωάννης πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἐν ὁδοῦ δικαιοσύνης, καὶ οὐκ ἐπίστεύσατε αὐτῷ· οἱ δὲ τελῶναι καὶ αἱ πόρναι ἐπίστευσαν αὐτῷ· ὑμεῖς δὲ ἰδόντες οὐδὲ μετεμελήθητε ὕστερον τοῦ πιστεῦσαι αὐτῷ.

“For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the harlots believed him; and even when you saw it, you did not afterward repent and believe him.”³

These words are a response to the questions of the chief priests and the elders of the people concerning Jesus’ authority to teach and the source of his authority (21:23). Jesus does not answer their questions directly but points them to the authority by which John came (21:24–25). Only sinners, tax collectors, and prostitutes believe and repent. In doing so, these unacceptable religious “outsiders” were more righteous than religious “insiders.” Jesus shifts the focus to John instead of himself because John was his forerunner and, if they had believed John’s message and repented, they would have been prepared to believe in Jesus, since his and John’s authority and mission were related.⁴ But because they did not believe John, they could not believe in Jesus. In other words, it is implied that Jesus himself also came in the way of righteousness, just like John. As M. Eugene Boring states, “[t]his text puts John and Jesus in the same category. Those who reject John also reject Jesus. Their question about Jesus’ authority is restated—not avoided—as the question of John’s authority.”⁵ So the question is, what does it mean to have “come in the way of righteousness” in relation to both John and Jesus?

John the Prophet

The Greek words *ἔρχομαι* and *ἦκω* are associated with prophets both in the LXX and NT and occur frequently in Matthew. John (3:1; 11:14, 18; 17:10–

³ Unless otherwise indicated, all translations of the Hebrew Bible and Greek New Testament are taken from the *Revised Standard Version* (except for changing “thy,” “thee,” and “men” to “your,” “you,” and “people” respectively, etc.).

⁴ John H. Hughes “John the Baptist: The Forerunner of God Himself,” *NovT* 14 (1972): 191–218, at 211.

⁵ M. Eugene Boring, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NIB 8; Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 411 and Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28* (WBC 33b; Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1995), 614.

12; and 21:32) and Jesus (2:6; 5:17; 9:13; 10:34–35; 11:3; 11:19; 16:17; 18:11; 20:28; and 25:10) are announced as the ones who came or come in the name of God. As David Jensen says, the theme of “coming” in the NT “can also announce a Messianic appearance.”⁶ Matthew seems to be intentional in using the word in relation to Jesus and the prophets. Thus, these words are “more redactional” in Matthew than in the other synoptic gospels.⁷

Matthew introduces John as the one who “came preaching” (3:1). Jesus also declares John to be the one who “came ... in the way of righteousness” (Matt 21:32), and as the Elijah who is to “come” according to prophecy (Matt 11:14; and Mal 4:5). Ὁδοῦς can mean a “way,” “road,” “path,” or “journey” (Gen 48:7; Deut 8:6; Job 9:26; Isa 59:8; Matt 2:12; Mark 11:8; and Luke 3:5); and a “way of life” or “conduct” (Gen 6:12; Prov 21:16; Matt 7:14; and 10:5).⁸ In Matthew (7:14; 10:5; and 21:32), the latter meanings are intended. Matthew seems to be saying that John the Baptist “came” in a righteous manner, just as the prophet Elijah did, but as a forerunner of the messiah.

John’s identification with Elijah is more explicit in Matthew 11:14 and 17:11–13 and Luke 1:17 than in Mark 9:13, where it is only implied. Matthew announces John as the fulfilment of the one prophesied by the prophets; he is the Φωνὴ βοῶντος ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ, Ἐτοιμάσατε τὴν ὁδὸν κυρίου (“voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord.” Matt 3:3; cf. Isa 40:3–6).

The Matthean Jesus presents John as the fulfilment of the prophecy. Ἴδου ἐγὼ ἀποστέλλω τὸν ἄγγελόν μου πρὸ προσώπου σου, ὃς κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδὸν σου ἔμπροσθέν σου (“Behold I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.” Matt 11:10; cf. Mal 3:1). He declares that John is the Elijah who is to come before him (11:14; 17:10–13). Jesus further explains that he is not just a prophet but “more than a prophet” (11:9) and that none greater was ever born of women (11:11). He was greater than

⁶ David Jensen, “Come, To,” in *New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 1: A–C (ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld; Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 706–707, at 706.

⁷ Robert Banks, “Matthew’s Understanding of the Law: Authenticity and Interpretation in Matthew 5:17–20,” *JBL* 93 (1974): 226–42, at 227.

⁸ Johan Lust, Erik Eynikel, and Katrin Hauspie, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (rev. ed.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2003), s.v. ὁδοῦς; W. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian literature*, trans. W.F. Arndt and F.W. Gingrich, rev. and expanded F.W. Danker (3rd ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. ὁδοῦς (henceforth BDAG).

others because he was not only the forerunner announcing the presence of the object of the messianic prophecy, he also baptised the messiah in the waters of the Jordan.⁹ He belonged to the “new era of God’s reign, inaugurated by Jesus.”¹⁰ His greatness has nothing to do with “personal greatness.”¹¹ The Matthean Jesus concludes that “John is the eschatological Elijah who stands at the turning of the ages” (Matt 11:12–15),¹² the fulfilment of prophecy, whose coming and mission is from God and is authentic.

The context of this announcement (Matt 11–12) is John sending two of his disciples to ask Jesus, “Are you the coming one” (11:3). The question of identity and authority is at issue. Jesus does not give a yes or no answer but points them to his healing ministry and preaching of the gospel to the poor (11:4–5). When the disciples had left, Jesus turns to the multitude and declares that John is a prophet, but more than a prophet (11:9–12). John creates an opportunity for Jesus to state who he is (11:3), and Jesus responds by pointing to messianic prophecy of Isaiah (11:4–5; 42:1–4; and 61:1). Jesus then goes on to tell the multitude who John is.

John’s Prophetic Characteristics

Although John was the greatest of all the prophets, he did not come in earthly greatness and reputation, but as a servant like the other prophets before him. As Craig Evans rightly puts it, John’s coming was modelled after Elijah.¹³ He dressed like Elijah (2 Kgs 1:8; and Matt 3:4),¹⁴ and his food resembled that of desert dwellers.¹⁵ Blomberg observes that both his “clothing and food point to an austerity and asceticism appropriate to his stern calls for repentance.”¹⁶ This is based on the fact that the multitude went out to see a

⁹ D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 8 (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 3–599, at 264.

¹⁰ Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew,” 268.

¹¹ Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew,” 268.

¹² Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew,” 268; and R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (Guernsey: Paternoster Press, 1989), 197.

¹³ Craig A. Evans, “John: The Baptist,” in Sackenfled, *New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 3: *I–Ma*, 345–51, at 348.

¹⁴ Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (NAC 22; Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman 1992), 75

¹⁵ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 75.

¹⁶ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 75; and Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew,” 268.

prophet, not a man clothed in soft clothing, but one dressed in camel's hair (Matt 11:8), implying that prophets do not appear in soft garments nor eat their fill, because soft garments and abundant foods are for the kings' court. As Boring says, Jesus' point is to affirm that John was a prophet.¹⁷ Not only his physical appearance and diet affirms his identity as a prophet, but his message of repentance. Evans notes that:

[h]is call for repentance, as well as his dress, argues that John saw himself as a prophet (Compare Zec 13:4, "put on a hairy mantle"; 2 Kgs 1:8, "a hairy man", with a leather belt around his waist"). Israel's classic prophets called on the people to repent (Isa 1:27; Jer 5:3; Ezel 14:6; compare Ezek 18:30; Joel 2:14; Jonah 3:9).¹⁸

The Message of John

John's message directly parallels that of Elijah and Jesus.¹⁹ Elijah's message was a message of repentance for Israel at a time of apostasy and idolatry. The nation together with its king and leaders were offering sacrifices to and worshiping Baal (1 Kgs 18:1–40). The king, Ahab, had built an altar in the temple of Baal and Israel had forsaken the commandments of the Lord to follow Baal (16:31–33). Like Elijah, John's message was μετανοεῖτε, ἡγγικεν γὰρ ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν ("Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Matt 3:2), and further that the messiah was coming who would baptise with fire and Holy Spirit (3:11).²⁰

John's message was also eschatological. Seeing the scribes and Pharisees come to him, he rebukes them for impenitence and warns them about the coming judgment (Matt 3:10–12). He calls for repentance because the kingdom of God is at hand (Matt 3:2). The religious leaders did not repent, but instead hardened their hearts, despised the truth, and persecuted God's messengers.

John is also, like Elijah, an outsider. He comes calling apostate Israel and their leaders to repent and be baptised. Many respond to his message and are baptised, but he rebukes the scribes and Pharisees as they come, "calling them a brood of vipers" (3:7) and accusing them of not bearing fruit worthy of repentance. John the Baptist did not only come to call Israel to repentance

¹⁷ Boring, "The Gospel of Matthew," 267–68.

¹⁸ Evans, "John: The Baptist," 347.

¹⁹ Evans, "John: The Baptist," 347; and Boring, "The Gospel of Matthew," 268.

²⁰ Evans, "John: The Baptist," 345.

but the religious leaders as well. The purpose of John's coming is to prepare the way for Jesus's coming, and his kingdom. Thus, to come in the way of righteousness is to come in the way that the prophets and Elijah, in particular, came.

Jesus as the Servant of God

For Matthew, if John was the greatest of all the prophets who stands at the turning of the age to prepare the way for the Messiah, Jesus' coming was the fulfilment of the messianic prophecy (Isa 7:14; 9:6–7; Jer 31:15; and Mic 5:2) about the coming of a saviour of the lost (Matt 1:1, 21; and 15:24), Both John and Jesus “came ... in the way of righteousness” (21:32), that is, in the way that the prophets came. The Matthean messiah also comes in the manner of a prophet because that is the way of righteousness. In this he sets a righteous example for the Matthean disciples in their conduct.

One of Matthew's motives for writing is to prove that Jesus has authority like John (Matt 21:32). Matthew, at the beginning of his account, immediately sets out to show that Jesus is the fulfilment of the long-awaited messianic prophecy (Matt 1:1; cf. Isa 9:6–7; Isa 11:1; cf. Jer 23:5; and 33:15–17). He uses titles like Christ (Χριστός), son of David (Matt 1:1; Zech 9:9–10; and Jer 23:5–6), “Son of God,”²¹ and “Son of Man”²² to refer to the divinity and royalty of Jesus. Matthew also stresses that Jesus is the servant of Isaiah.²³ Isaiah 42:1–4 is quoted in full to make that point (Matt 12:18–20).²⁴ Although this passage is too long to analyse, it is important to note that Matthew declares that Jesus is the child/slave/servant (παῖς) of God.²⁵ As Luz says, instead of using the word “son” he uses “slave/servant” because “of the Christological interpretation” in earlier chapters.²⁶

²¹ Stuart K. Weber, *Matthew* (Holman New Testament Commentary 1; Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2000), 27; Peter M. Head, *Christology and the Synoptic Problem: An Argument for Markan Priority* (SNTSMS 94; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 200; and France, *Matthew*, 292.

²² Karkkainen, *Christology*, 26.

²³ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (PNTC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 310.

²⁴ Richard Beaton, *Isaiah's Christ in Matthew's Gospel* (SNTSMS 123; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 17.

²⁵ Lust, Eynikel, and Hauspie, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v., παῖς; BDAG, s.v., παῖς.

²⁶ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8–20* (trans. James E. Crouch; Eng. ed.; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), 192.

The word “beloved,” which is redactional, “enforces the closeness of the relationship in a way which reminds us of [Matt] 11:27.”²⁷ The same word is used in two of the most significant events in Jesus’ life where the Father speaks and declares that he is beloved: at Jesus’ baptism (3:17) and at his transfiguration (17:5). As France states, “Matthew’s readers would have had no difficulty in identifying the mysterious ‘servant’ of Isaiah with the promised anointed one.”²⁸

The servant of Matthew is the suffering but obedient servant of God (Matt 11:12-20; and Isa 42:1–4) and the sin-bearing servant (Isa 53). Towards the end of Isaiah 53, the sin-bearing righteous servant “will make many to be accounted righteous” (53:11; Matt 27:39–44, and 63). Despite the oppressive treatment of the servant in Isaiah 53, his obedience to the will of God is uncompromised. This lived response to the same kind of treatment is what Jesus has in view in the Sermon on the Mount, especially concerning the Beatitudes and rejoicing in persecution (5:1–12). Only through such a righteous life can judgement and victory come.²⁹ As Luz concludes, Jesus “is increasingly persecuted and threatened as he travels through Israel.”³⁰ Only those who see the future glory of Jesus and heaven will endure the present.³¹ Jesus’ ultimate mission is to give his life for the righteousness of many.

Parallels between John and Jesus

Jesus’ message, μετανοεῖτε, ἡγγικεν γὰρ ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν (“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is a hand.” Matt 4:17), is, according to Matthew, the same as the message of John (3:2). As Evans says, Matthew is intentional in providing a strong link between their messages.³² The only difference between the life and mission of the two is that John is subordinate to Jesus.³³ Like John, Jesus comes as an outsider calling on backsliding Israel to repent because the kingdom of God has come and the ultimate consummation is very imminent. As Boring notes, the “eschatological reality is the basis for

²⁷ France, *Matthew*, 472.

²⁸ France, *Matthew*, 472.

²⁹ Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 196.

³⁰ Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 195–96.

³¹ Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 195–96.

³² Evans, “John: The Baptist,” 346.

³³ Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, 289; Walter Wink, *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition* (SNTS 7; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 37.

Jesus' call for repentance (as it as for John earlier and will be for the disciples later).³⁴ As France correctly states:

[b]oth of them preach in the same words (3:2 with 4:17; 3:7 with 23:33; 3:10 with 7:19); the authority of Jesus' mission is the same as that of John (21:23–27; cf. v. 32); both suffer the same violent response (11:12), and both are (for different reasons) unacceptable to “this generation” (11:16–19). John, as the returning Elijah (11:4), represents the beginning of the age of fulfilment which succeeds the age of “prophesying” (11:13).³⁵

The religious leaders questioned Jesus' authority (21:32) because they did not see him as part of their religious sect or community. Jesus' act of embracing John puts them both in the same category. Matthew's Jesus says, “John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon’; the Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Behold, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners’” (Matt 11:18–19). Both are rejected because they are outsiders. So, their coming “in the way of righteousness” is not merely to do with food or clothing, but with their authority and mission, the internal religion that annoyed the religious leaders so much. It is the authority of Matthew's Jesus and John that causes the leaders to be concerned.

John and Jesus “coming in the way of righteousness” means that their coming is in obedience to the will of God and according to prophecy, and that they faithfully accomplish the task entrusted to them. This is the way of righteousness.

To Fulfil All Righteousness (Matt 3:15)

ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτόν, Ἄφες ἄρτι, οὕτως γὰρ πρέπον ἐστὶν ἡμῖν πληρῶσαι πᾶσαν δικαιοσύνην.

“But Jesus answered him, ‘Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness.’”

This passage is considered to be controversial, especially as regards πρέπον ἐστὶν ἡμῖν πληρῶσαι πᾶσαν δικαιοσύνην (“it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness”).³⁶ Jesus does not give an explanatory response to the

³⁴ Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew,” 175.

³⁵ France, *Matthew*, 198.

³⁶ Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 142.

question raised by John in v. 14, but only responds, “let it to be so now,” simply meaning that the baptism should proceed at that point,³⁷ because it was “fitting” for John to baptise Jesus, and also because by doing so they were to “fulfil all righteousness.” What is not clear is how by the act of baptism both should fulfil all righteousness.³⁸

Several different interpretations are possible. The phrase “fulfil all righteousness” could mean that Jesus is looking forward to his death as the sin-bearing servant of God,³⁹ because then he as the righteous servant would justify many (Isa 53:11).⁴⁰ It could also mean that Matthew’s Jesus is setting an example for those who would decide to follow him, or it could be referring to the fulfilment of biblical prophecies.⁴¹ Some also say that since Jesus is not the only one “fulfilling all righteousness” in this context, it is inappropriate to conclude that this righteousness refers to the righteousness that results from Jesus’ death and resurrection because, if it were, John would also fulfil righteousness for all. Thus, they claim that this righteousness refers to fulfilling God’s demand or will.⁴² However, instead of focusing on what righteousness means, it is important to look at “all righteousness” and whether that only includes the baptism or more.

Luz argues that *πᾶσαν* (all) is not specific to the baptism but refers to “everything that is righteous.” The fulfilling of “all righteousness” is not for Jesus alone, but includes every Christian from whom Jesus demanded the “greater righteousness” (5:50), and the demand to obey “everything I have commanded you” (28:20).⁴³ Thus, he concludes that:

[a]ll righteousness” does not consists of John’s baptism; it merely belongs to it. The sentence takes on a programmatic character. The Jesus who is obedient to the will of God becomes the Christian’s prototype and model.⁴⁴

However, “it is fitting for us” appears to contradict what Luz is saying. As France rightly points out, the word “us ... indicates that Jesus is thinking of

³⁷ Morris, *Matthew*, 64.

³⁸ Morris, *Matthew*, 64; and Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 325.

³⁹ Oscar Cullmann, *Baptism in the New Testament* (trans. J. K. S. Reid; Eng. ed.; Studies in Biblical Theology 1; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 19.

⁴⁰ France, *Matthew*, 120.

⁴¹ Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 141–42.

⁴² Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 141–42.

⁴³ Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 141–42.

⁴⁴ Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 141–42.

something specific to his own and John's role rather than of a great principle."⁴⁵ To "fulfil" refers specifically to the baptism, but also includes future events—the death and resurrection of Jesus—of which it is symbolic. It does not refer to "everything that is righteous" for "all Christians," as Luz argues.⁴⁶

As mentioned in the first section, although they worked side by side and both are identified as sent by God with a mission, their individual missions were different. John came to "prepare the way" for the messiah, and Jesus as messiah came to save the world. Therefore, fulfilling of righteousness can mean both fulfilling God's will (John baptising Jesus, and Jesus submitting to John's baptism), and the salvation/righteousness that Jesus provided through his death and resurrection (symbolised by the baptism).

Since the word fulfil, as used by Matthew, has a "scripturally authenticated pattern" (cf. 5:17), the fulfilling of all righteousness could also mean everything involved in the prophecies, especially the messianic prophecy, Jesus sacrificial death, and John as the forerunner.⁴⁷

As discussed in the first section, both Jesus and John are working side by side. Jesus does not separate himself from John, both in authority, message, and mission. Now at this crucial point in their ministry, both John and Jesus must first fulfil "all righteousness." John as a prophet and a human obeying God by completing this part of his mission, the baptism. It is the climax of John's mission, one part of preparing the way for Jesus.⁴⁸ For Jesus, the baptism is not just preparing him for ministry, but is a symbol of the climax of his ministry, his death and resurrection. John as a prophet fulfils righteousness as a prophet, and Jesus as the obedient servant of God.

The Meaning of Righteousness in Relation to John and Jesus

According to Matthew, although John was subordinate to Jesus, they both had the responsibility to fulfil all righteousness, which is to faithfully fulfil the will of God in terms of living the life prophesied of them and faithfully carrying out the mission given to them. John was fulfilling his ultimate mission by baptising Jesus, while for Jesus it was his baptism which marked the beginning of his mission, a symbol of his ultimate mission of the

⁴⁵ France, *Matthew*, 120–21.

⁴⁶ Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 141–42.

⁴⁷ France, *Matthew*, 120.

⁴⁸ France, *Matthew*, 120–21.

crucifixion and resurrection.⁴⁹ John could not have fulfilled Jesus' mission, but he did what was given to him to do. Likewise, Jesus was to submit to John as God willed. Although both gave their lives to God, Jesus' fulfilling of the law could mean more than John's did, because John only came to prepare the way of the Lord (Matt 3:1–3), while Jesus came to give his life a ransom for the sins of the world (Matt 1:1 and 21).

Thus, it is apparent that John's "coming in the way of righteousness" "and fulfilling all righteousness" (3:15) means that both he and Jesus came according to the will of God and lived their lives and fulfilled their missions even at the cost of their lives. They come just like the prophets of the OT who came in the name and authority of God with a specific mission for Israel. They are characterised as humble slaves/servants whose only duty is to do God's will and remain faithful to their duty when the insiders to whom they are sent persecute them. No matter the rejection and persecution, the prophets endure fulfilling God's will and mission.

SERMON ON THE MOUNT (MATT 5:6, 10, 20; 6:1, AND 33): THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND DISCIPLESHIP

A typology of the Sermon on the Mount derives from the OT, where Jesus is presented as the new Moses.⁵⁰ A number of commentators argue that the introductory narratives of the gospel clearly imply the new Moses imagery.⁵¹ The infancy narratives and the mission of Jesus and Moses are parallel. Both kings, Pharaoh and Herod, plotted to kill every male child because their kingdom and kingship were threatened, but both Moses and Jesus survived through the providence of God (Exod 1–2; and Matt 1–2).⁵² When those kings died, God instructed them to return, Moses to Egypt (Exod 4:19), and Jesus to Israel (2:20). Like Moses, at the end of the birth narrative Matthew's reader anticipates the rise of a new leader and a new exodus. After Jesus' baptism, he goes into the wilderness and remains there forty days and nights

⁴⁹ Wink, *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition*, 37–38.

⁵⁰ Dale C. Allison Jr, *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993), 97.

⁵¹ Johann P. Lange, *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, vol. 1: The Gospel according to Matthew (trans. Philip Schaff; Eng. ed.; New York: Charles Scribner, 1865), 106; Raymond Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977), 107–109; and Allison, *The New Moses*, 140–65.

⁵² Wayne S. Baxter, "Mosaic Imagery in the Gospel of Matthew," *TJ* 20 (1999): 69–83, at 70.

(Matt 4:2), and then appears on the mount, like Moses, to teach (Exod 24:18). He sits on a mountain, a teacher figure, giving the law like Moses did (Matt 5–7).⁵³ The Matthean messiah then reinterprets the OT law and the prophets in the light of the imminent eschaton.⁵⁴

Matthew presents the new Moses, Jesus, an outsider and a radical teacher, who has authority to reinterpret the law and the prophets. He is about to turn the familiar religious system of his time upside down with his teaching. The insiders, religious leaders and those who will not accept Jesus, will turn on him. Jesus contrasts himself with Moses, and with the scribes and Pharisees. He reinterprets the Abrahamic covenant and parts of the Mosaic law and calls those who believe to repentance.

However, Matthew does not provide a clear introductory statement or statement of intent at the beginning of this extensive discourse. Scholars have seen related but different themes in the discourse. France suggests that discipleship is the theme.⁵⁵ Westerholm puts it as “the righteousness demanded of the disciples,”⁵⁶ and Luz proposes that it is best summarised as the righteousness of the kingdom of heaven.⁵⁷ All, however, agreed that Matthew 5:20 encapsulates the theme of the entire discourse.⁵⁸ The verse focuses on the righteousness needed to enter the kingdom of God.⁵⁹

Throughout the discourse Matthew keeps his theme in view: “righteousness” and “the kingdom of God,” and the character of the disciples who will be part of the kingdom of God. Jesus’ first words in the Gospel of Matthew are about the need “to fulfil all righteousness” (3:15), and his eschatological message is to “repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (4:17). Both serve as the introduction and theme of his message and the mission ahead of him. In chapter 5, Matthew mentions “righteousness” five

⁵³ John W. Welch, *The Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple* (SOTSMS; Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 21.

⁵⁴ Stephen Westerholm, “The Law in the Sermon on the Mount: Matt 5:17-48,” *CTR* 6 (1992): 43–56, at 44.

⁵⁵ France, *Matthew*, 153.

⁵⁶ Westerholm, “The Law in the Sermon on the Mount,” 48.

⁵⁷ Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 177.

⁵⁸ Westerholm, “The Law in the Sermon on the Mount,” 48; France, *Matthew*, 177–78; and Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 177.

⁵⁹ Robert A. Guelich, “Interpreting the Sermon on the Mount,” *Int* 41 (1987): 117–30, at 126.

times (5:6, 10, 20; 6:1, and 33), and this is done in light of the eschatological kingdom of God (5:3, 10, 12, 19-20, 6:33; and 7:21).⁶⁰

All the other δικαιοσύνη-passages in the sermon contribute, in one way or another, to explaining the greater righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees.⁶¹ The message also echoes that of John and Elijah's messages of repentance and preparation for the kingdom of heaven. It is directed to the disciples and those who would follow Jesus throughout his ministry and then that of his disciples. Thus, it is appropriate to assign the following title to the sermon: "Discourse on the Righteousness of the Kingdom of God and Discipleship."

Greater Righteousness: Reinterpretation of the Law as an Internal Religion by an Outsider (Matt 5:20)

λέγω γὰρ ὑμῖν ὅτι ἐὰν μὴ περισσεύσῃ ὑμῶν ἡ δικαιοσύνη πλεῖον τῶν γραμματέων καὶ Φαρισαίων, οὐ μὴ εἰσέλθητε εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν.

"For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

The new Moses, Jesus, is about to reinterpret the law and the prophets, and condemn the hypocrisy of the scribes and the Pharisees. Before doing that, he has to lay a clear and solid foundation with respect to his authority and the continuity and validity of the law in order to avoid any potential misunderstandings or doubts. He does this in the first three verses (5:17–19).⁶²

"I have come" (ἦλθον, 5:17) has a thematic connection to "John came (ἦλθεν) to you in the way of righteousness" (Matt 21:32). Jesus is seen not only as the Messiah, but as sent by God in the way of the prophets like John and OT prophets who were persecuted. Having been sent by God, as seen above, both John and Jesus had to "fulfil all righteousness" (3:15). So ἦλθον implies authority (a prophet-like messiah sent by God) and mission (to fulfil the law and the prophets).⁶³ So, in the Sermon on the Mount, the Matthean new Moses affirms the continuity and validity of the law and the prophets.

⁶⁰ Guelich, "Interpreting the Sermon on the Mount," 126.

⁶¹ Guelich, "Interpreting the Sermon on the Mount," 126.

⁶² Boring, "The Gospel of Matthew," 185.

⁶³ Morris, *Matthew*, 107.

ἀμὴν γὰρ λέγω ὑμῖν (v. 18) and other “I say to you” phrases in the rest of the discourse (5: 22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44; 6: 2, 5, 16, and 25) also show Jesus’ authority to validate, fulfil, and reinterpret the law and prophets (23:4).

In 5:18 Jesus reiterates his statement in v. 17 with the addition of “not an iota, not a dot.” The ἰῶτα is the smallest letter in the Greek alphabet, and κεραία is a stroke in the Hebrew alphabet to distinguish words that are similar. The phrase μίαν τῶν ἐντολῶν τούτων τῶν ἐλαχίστων (“one of the least of these commandments”, v. 19) links back to the iota and dot of v. 18. Verse 19 states the “practical explication” of this principle by making reference to the minutest particulars of the law.⁶⁴ The iota and dot and the explanation in v. 19 form “a very emphatic assertion of the validity of the scripture.”⁶⁵ This is the reason why those who desire to be part of the kingdom of heaven must conform to even the least of the commandments. The Matthean Jesus has no intention of undermining or disregarding the Mosaic law or causing confusion, but he intends to validate (vv.17–20), internalise, and expose the depths of the law and the prophets (vv. 20–48).⁶⁶ For Matthew, Jesus did not only come to “fulfil the law,” but to fulfil both the “law and the prophets” (5:17). As France rightly observes:

[t]he law is thus linked with the prophets as looking forward to a time of fulfilment which has now arrived. The Torah, then, is not God’s last words to his people, but it is in a sense provisional, looking forward to a time of fulfilment through the Messiah.⁶⁷

So, Jesus is the new Moses who has the power and authority to sit on Moses’ seat and declare that “unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” Verse 20 is the link between the preface, validation (vv. 17–19), and how a righteous disciple ought to have “greater righteousness.”

What did it mean for one to exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees? As Boring says, the meaning of the “greater righteousness” is presented in a refined “essay abstract” and explicated “by six concrete

⁶⁴ Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 82; and Brice L. Martin, *Christ and the Law in Matthew* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 148.

⁶⁵ Morris, *Matthew*, 107; and Gundry, *Matthew*, 82

⁶⁶ Don Garlington, “The ‘Better Righteousness:’ Matthew 5:20,” *BBR* 20 (2010): 479–502, at 481; and Westerholm, “The Law in the Sermon on the Mount,” 47.

⁶⁷ France, *Matthew*, 182–83.

examples.”⁶⁸ However, the explanation does not end with the six antitheses, but continues throughout the discourse. Keeping of the law and the prophets, for Matthew, was not just about an outward conformity, but about an inward conviction that was manifested in love and compassion.

Within the immediate context (5:21–45), Matthew presents the six antitheses that model “greater righteousness,”⁶⁹ each of them being introduced with the juxtaposition of ἠκούσατε ὅτι ἐρρέθη, ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν (“you have heard that it was said, but I say to you”).⁷⁰ He contrasts the Mosaic with the messianic interpretation of murder (is anger) (vv. 21–26), adultery (is lust) (vv. 27–29), divorce (only for adultery) (vv. 31–32), swearing false oaths (or not swearing at all) (vv. 33–36), proportionate retribution (or turning the other cheek) (vv. 38–42), and hating (or loving) one’s enemies (vv. 43–48).⁷¹ By doing this the Matthean Jesus internalises the law of Moses, promoting an inner attitude that manifestes itself in obedience and acts of righteousness, and condemns mere outward conformity. According to the first antithesis, the Mosaic law said “you shall not murder” (Matt 5:21; and Exod 20:13), but Jesus says whoever is angry with and insults his brother will be liable to the council (v. 22). Words like anger, reconciliation (v. 24), and lust (v. 28) are associated with the thoughts and inward attitudes. The Mosaic law was focused on actions, the final manifestation of one’s internal condition and intention. Thus, Jesus’ interpretation focuses on the internal rightness that results in genuine conformity to the law of God without hypocrisy. This is the kind of righteousness that Jesus expects.

Jesus does not condemn the scribes and the Pharisees for keeping the law, but he does condemn their mere outward conformity and hypocrisy,⁷² and also the alteration and perversion of the law of God (because their hearts are far from their righteousness).⁷³ As Ziesler observes, Matthew is not in opposition to law-righteousness, but is concerned with its fulfilment, with

⁶⁸ Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew,” 188.

⁶⁹ Westerholm, “The Law in the Sermon on the Mount,” 47.

⁷⁰ Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew,” 188

⁷¹ James A. Brooks, “The Unity and the Structure of the Sermon on the Mount,” *CTR* 6 (1992): 15–28, at 27.

⁷² Morris, *Matthew*, 107.

⁷³ Dale C. Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination* (Companions to the New Testament; New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1999), 110.

something “more demanding and thoroughgoing”⁷⁴ The second thing the Matthean Jesus condemns is incorrect motive for keeping the law (Matt 6).

Motives and Righteousness (Matt 6:1)

Προσέχετε [δὲ] τὴν δικαιοσύνην ὑμῶν μὴ ποιεῖν ἔμπροσθεν τῶν ἀνθρώπων πρὸς τὸ θεαθῆναι αὐτοῖς· εἰ δὲ μήγε, μισθὸν οὐκ ἔχετε παρὰ τῷ πατρὶ ὑμῶν τῷ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς.

“Beware of practising your righteousness before people in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.”

The theme of “greater righteousness” is further explained in Matt 6:1–18. In Matt 5:21–48 Jesus reinterprets the Mosaic law by internalising it when conduct or action is in view;⁷⁵ but in Matt 6:1–18 he moves to selfish motives and hypocrisy in keeping the law.⁷⁶ As Dale Allison notes, Matt “6:1–18 has remarkably close parallels in 23:1–2.”⁷⁷ Although 6:1–18 may refer to scribes and Pharisees, the subject of Jesus’ rebuke for hypocrisy is not clear. In contrast, in Matt 23 Jesus says over and over again, “Woe to you scribes and Pharisees!” Matthew often identifies hypocrisy with the scribes and Pharisees, and there are also continual confrontations between Jesus and the Pharisees. As Douglas Hare argues, “anti-Pharisaism is an inherited part of Matthew’s religious outlook.”⁷⁸ According to Allison:

Matthew speaks of “hypocrites.” Throughout his Gospel they are usually identified with the scribes and Pharisees etc. ... and those groups are probably the implicit subject of 6:2-6, 6-18 as well. The scribes and Pharisees are hypocrites because they say one thing and do another (23:23–28), and because their hearts are wrong even when they outwardly observe the Torah (23:1–15, 23–28).⁷⁹

In Matt 6:1 Jesus pays close attention to outward demonstrations of righteousness. He rebukes wrong motives in three areas of religious

⁷⁴ J. A. Ziesler, *The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul: A Linguistic and Theological Enquiry* (SNTSMS 20; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 134.

⁷⁵ Banks, “Matthews Understanding of the Law,” 242.

⁷⁶ Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 107.

⁷⁷ Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 108.

⁷⁸ Douglas R. A. Hare, *The Theme of Jewish Persecution of Christians in the Gospel according to Matthew* (SNTSMS 6; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 84.

⁷⁹ Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 110.

practice: almsgiving (6:2–4), prayer (6:5–14), and fasting (6:18). Jesus condemns the hypocrisy of the religious leaders in the synagogues and streets (6:2), where their religious acts are done to be seen and praised by people (6:2, 5, and 16). Hypocrisy is mentioned fourteen times in Matthew and seventeen times elsewhere. Most occurrences are in the seven woes of Matt 23.⁸⁰

Jesus, according to Matt 23, saw the scribes and the Pharisees sitting in the metaphorical seat of Moses (23:2). As a type of Moses, he assures the people that what the scribes and Pharisees teach is acceptable, but what they do is hypocritical and must not be practised, because they pretend only for an outward show, and are not converted from the heart. As Powell says, if the disciples do what the scribes and Pharisees teach, the “disciples will fulfil the will of God to a degree that the scribes and Pharisees themselves do not.”⁸¹ That is, there is nothing wrong with the law or the teachings of the teachers of the law, but their practice is at fault because they do not live according to what they teach. Here is another pointer to the “greater righteousness” of Matthew 5:20.

They want to be seen by people (23:5), given the best seats at feasts and in the synagogue (23:6), greeted in market places (23:7), and called rabbi (23:7). But in the sight of God their good deeds are hypocritical and lawless. Their righteousness is in fact self-righteousness (23:28). They are like whitewashed tombs appearing to be beautiful on the outside, but full of dead bones and uncleanness on the inside (23:27). Thus, Jesus distinguishes the true (i.e., righteous) disciple from hypocrites, who only claim to be right. The true disciple’s motive in performing religious duty is to glorify God only. They do not seek earthly reward, whereas the hypocrites practice righteousness to be seen by people, to be rewarded and praised by them. They want worldly honour and applause. In other words, the kind of righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees is without pretense, and the motive is purely to glorify God.

⁸⁰ Karla Pollmann, “Hypocrisy and the History of Salvation: Medieval Interpretations of Matthew 23,” *WS* 114 (2001): 469–82, at 470.

⁸¹ Mark A. Powell, “Do and Keep What Moses Says (Matthew 23:2–7),” *JBL* 114 (1995): 419–35, at 421.

The Treatment of the Prophets

Matthew 23 also talks about the righteous receiving the treatment of the prophets (cf. Matt 5:10–12). The last woe is a rebuke to the scribes and Pharisees for persecuting the prophets and those who came in the name of the Lord (Matt 23:29–36). Again, the insider-outsider theme is present here. Those who come as a prophet comes will be persecuted for their righteous obedience and proclamation of God’s message (23:34). Abel and Zechariah are given as examples of those who were killed for righteousness’ sake (23:35). The Matthean Jesus predicts that the same thing will happen to those whom God sends to preach repentance and righteousness in Israel. The religious leaders will persecute them, just as their fathers did (Matt 23:34 and 36), because of their blindness and hard hearts.

The message is that those who were rebuked for apostasy and hypocrisy were not willing to humble themselves and repent. Instead, they killed the prophets and God’s messengers. Like them, the scribes and Pharisees pretend to honour the prophets and the righteous by building and adorning monuments for them, but their hearts are far from God and righteousness (23:29–30).⁸² They also will persecute the righteous (disciples) for their righteousness and message.

Anthony Saldarini, on the other hand, observes that:

the author of Matthew seeks specifically to delegitimize rival Jewish leaders and legitimate himself and his group as the true leaders of Israel, accurate interpreters of the Bible and the authentic messengers of God’s will. The warrant for their claim is, of course, through the life and teaching of Jesus whom Matthew acknowledges as the Son of God.⁸³

It is not necessary to go this far. Matthew’s Jesus speaks about his own time from the perspective of the biblical-historical past being repeated in the present and the future. In Matthew 21 and 22 Jesus denounces the religious scribes and Pharisees through parables and “then hammers them with seven woe oracles (chap. 23)”⁸⁴ which seem to be the opposite of the seven beatitudes.⁸⁵

⁸² Hare, *The Theme of Jewish Persecution of Christians*, 84.

⁸³ Anthony J. Saldarini, “Delegitimation of the Leaders in Matthew 23,” *CBQ* 54 (1992): 659–80, at 660.

⁸⁴ Saldarini, “Delegitimation of the Leaders”, 661.

⁸⁵ Saldarini, “Delegitimation of the Leaders,” 660.

Jesus points out that the scribes and Pharisees are blind guides (Matt 23:16) sitting in the seat of Moses. Jesus, as the Messiah, takes the seat of Moses (Matt 23:1) to teach the law with new light and the eschaton in view (see Matt 23:36). The Matthean Jesus says that all good deeds ought to be done to glorify God so as to be rewarded by him. He teaches that his followers should not follow the Pharisees' example. In other words, they are to become Jesus' disciples and not disciples of the scribes and the Pharisees. Moreover, if they do follow Jesus, they will be persecuted by the scribes and Pharisees.

Seeking First God's Righteousness (Matt 6:33)

ζητείτε δὲ πρῶτον τὴν βασιλείαν [τοῦ θεοῦ] καὶ τὴν δικαιοσύνην αὐτοῦ, καὶ ταῦτα πάντα προστεθήσεται ὑμῖν.

“Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.”

Moving on from the discussion of right motivation for performing religious practices or the law (5:17–48; and 6:1–18), Matthew's Jesus now focuses on desire or worldview. He teaches that life's greatest pursuit is God's kingdom and its righteousness, not temporary needs and material wealth. God's kingdom, according to Matthew, is both present and future (Matt 3:2; 4:17; and 10:7). It has already come, but Jesus' disciples are to seek it diligently looking forward to the final culmination upon the return of Jesus.

ζητεῖτε, here, makes a contrast with the Gentiles seeking (ἐπιζητοῦσιν) in v. 32. The word ἐπιζητοῦσιν is a “strong compound word for seek,” which means to eagerly seek or desire something. The Gentiles anxiously seek after the necessities of life, while the disciples “have a different orientation, a higher purpose in life.”⁸⁶ This verse seems to be more than just an admonition to seek God and not to worry. In line with the Matthean presentation of righteousness, Jesus is comparing the basic worldview of a Gentile (who does not know God) and his righteous disciples (who know God).

There may be allusions here to Isa 55 where Israel is invited to an abundant life (55:1–11). The passage talks about seeking God and buying food and water without money (55:1–2). The reason being that the literal

⁸⁶ France, *Matthew*, 270.

food and water are perishable; they do not truly satisfy.⁸⁷ The treasures of this world are perishable and thieves can steal and destroy them, but the treasures of heaven are eternal (Matt 6:19–21). They are told to seek first the treasures of heaven, God’s kingdom and his righteousness. This seeking means more than just desiring; it is an active seeking.⁸⁸

Thus, the “greater righteousness” theme of the Sermon on the Mount is explained by the reinterpretation of the Mosaic law. Jesus focuses on the internal aspects of action, purity of motive, and condemns hypocrisy, selfishness, and self-righteousness. Jesus’ righteous followers are expected to seek God and his righteousness not worldly possessions and prosperity. All of these things are to be done for God’s glory alone, and not for earthly honour or fame. Only then can his disciples practise and have the righteousness of God and, thereby, inherit the kingdom of God.

Hungering and Thirsting for Righteousness (Matt 5:6)

μακάριοι οἱ πεινῶντες καὶ διψῶντες τὴν δικαιοσύνην, ὅτι αὐτοὶ χορτασθήσονται

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”

The adjective μακάριος means blessed or fortunate.⁸⁹ If Matthew 5:17 – 7:29 is a reinterpretation of the Mosaic law in light of eschatology, the Beatitudes seem to be a reinterpretation of the Abrahamic covenant (see Gen 12:1–3; 13:14–17; 15:1–7; 17:1–8; and 22:15–18).⁹⁰ The Beatitudes are “not statements about human virtues ... [r]ather [they are about] authentic discipleship in the Christian community.”⁹¹ The Beatitudes are the

⁸⁷ There is also a call to repentance, where the unrighteous and the wicked are called to forsake their ways and thoughts (55:7).

⁸⁸ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 451.

⁸⁹ Ceslas Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* (trans. James D. Ernest; Eng. ed.; 3 vols.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 2.432, s.v. μακάριος; and *BDAG*, s. v. μακάριος

⁹⁰ Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew,” 177; Günther Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth* (trans. Irene and Fraser McLuskey with James M. Robinson; Eng. ed.; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1960), 69. See George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 122–48 and 285–86; George Eldon Ladd, *Crucial Questions about the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968), 77–98; and George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Popular Exposition of the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1959), 13–23.

⁹¹ Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew,” 178.

characteristics of true disciples, who are identified with the persecuted prophets as opposed to Jewish religious leaders.

The blessings of the Beatitudes recall the seven blessings promised to Abram (Gen 12:1–3). Abram was told that he would be a blessing to all nations, and that those who cursed him would be cursed and those who blessed him would be blessed.⁹² From the first two promises, Abraham would enjoy both “progeny and material wealth” within the covenant.⁹³ From the third promise, “to make his name great,” Abraham would be highly esteemed throughout the nations and generations. Nahum Sarna explains:

[i]n the ancient Near East, the name was not merely a convenient designation but an expression of the very essence of being. Hence, this promise means not only that Abraham will acquire fame but also that he will be highly esteemed as a man of superior character.⁹⁴

God reaffirms the Abrahamic covenant with Isaac (Gen 26:24) and Jacob (Gen 27:28–29; and 28:3–4) across three generations, because blessing and multiplying the descendants of Abraham was part of the promised blessings. The covenant was then reaffirmed again in the Sinai covenant (Exod 20–23; 24–34; cf. Deut 6:1–3) and the Davidic covenant (2 Sam 7:4–17). In the Jewish tradition every Israelite knew and cherished the Abrahamic covenant and its blessings. As the descendants of Abraham, they claimed to be God’s chosen ones having membership of his kingdom, its blessings and favour. Matthews states that:

[i]t is commonplace in the Old Testament for divine “blessing” to favor the recipient with many descendants and material prosperity. A “blessing” presupposes a relationship between God and the persons blessed. Especially in the patriarchal narratives, God’s blessing means proliferation and success (e.g., 12:2–3; 17:16; 22:17; 26:24; 39:5; 48:3–4). Blessing by Israel’s patriarchs calls for a fruitful progeny and understands that it is God who determines the outcome of the blessing (e.g., 28:1–3; 48:15–20).⁹⁵

⁹² Cf. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* (WBC 1; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 274–75.

⁹³ Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 1–11:26* (NAC 1A; Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 113.

⁹⁴ Nahum M. Sarna (ed.), *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 89.

⁹⁵ Matthews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 158.

But in Matthew, John rebukes the Pharisees and the Sadducees for calling themselves children of Abraham while not bearing “fruit that befits repentance” (Matt 3:8). He describes them as “children of vipers” because of their self-righteousness and pride.⁹⁶ It is implied that the religious leaders saw no need of repentance because they were descendants of Abraham and were, therefore, chosen and blessed through him, unlike the Gentiles.⁹⁷ But John says, “God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham” (Matt 3:9), which also means that God’s grace is inclusive and is extended to the people outside of the Abrahamic lineage.⁹⁸ Righteousness and salvation do not depend on being children of Abraham or an Israelite but on personal humility and repentance.⁹⁹ Only then can one bear the fruit of repentance.

Although John is not clear on what the “fruit that befits repentance” (καρπὸν ἄξιον τῆς μετανοίας) means; it probably means discipleship within the theme of greater righteousness and the doing of God’s will in line with the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount. Boring also argues that the fruit of repentance is a “representation of the life of discipleship to Jesus, which he will have Jesus elaborate at the key junctures in the narrative (7:16–20; 12:33; cf. 13:8, 26; and 21:18–19).”¹⁰⁰ However, discipleship is not filled merely with good works, but the transformation from within, which results in good works.¹⁰¹

Thus, John preaches repentance because the kingdom of heaven is for those who repent, and not for those who think they will inherit the kingdom through their traditions and descent from Abraham. The Matthean Jesus also says that many who will enter the kingdom of heaven to sit with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are not Abraham’s descendants and that the children of Abraham will be cast out (Matt 8:11–12).

Jesus reinterprets the Abrahamic covenant and enlightens the minds of the multitude and the disciples about the true character and virtue of the righteous disciple who will inherit the future kingdom of God. The righteous

⁹⁶ Archibald T. Robertson, “The Gospel according to Matthew,” in *The Word Pictures in the New Testament* (ed. James A. Swanson; 6 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Bakers Book House, 1930), 1.27.

⁹⁷ Carson, “Matthew,” 103.

⁹⁸ Carson, “Matthew,” 103.

⁹⁹ Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew” 157.

¹⁰⁰ Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew,” 157.

¹⁰¹ Morris, *Matthew*, 58.

and the blessed are not defined by material prosperity or worldly honour, but by doing God's will, being treated like the prophets, and rejoicing in persecution. These are the true heavenly treasures (Matt 5:3–12; and 6:19–34).

The Meaning of Hungering and Thirsting for Righteousness

The participles *πεινῶντες* καὶ *διψῶντες* (hungering and thirsting) are used metaphorically. They portray the disciples' priority and their basic orientation in comparison to the stereotypical Jew who claimed to be righteous. The participles picture an intense longing for righteousness.¹⁰² The context of the use of *δικαιοσύνη* here is also related to that of 6:33, where the priority and basic worldview of the followers of Christ are described. Those who are *πεινῶντες* καὶ *διψῶντες* after righteousness are the same as those who seek after God's kingdom and his righteousness.¹⁰³

Righteousness here refers both to right conduct and God's intervention in bestowing righteousness. France claims that righteousness refers to "right conduct only," which cannot be correct because there are two parts to it: *πεινῶντες* καὶ *διψῶντες* ("hungering and thirsting"), and *χορτασθήσονται* ("they will be filled"). As Morris says, "They *will be filled* ... surely means God will fill them (cf. 6:33, 'his righteousness')." ¹⁰⁴ He goes on to say, "We need not doubt that the term here includes the doing of right, an indication that we are expected to live in full accordance with the will of God. How can anyone have a strong desire for a right standing before God without at the same time strongly wanting to do that right?" ¹⁰⁵

In the Jewish society, especially during the patriarchal period, the righteous were not supposed to go hungry, or thirsty, they were not supposed to be poor or be mournful because God's covenant with Abraham was filled with promises of blessings, prosperity, and greatness (Gen 12:1–3). Those having the characteristics mentioned in the Beatitudes would have been considered to be sinners before God. Thus, Jesus reinterprets the Abrahamic covenant in saying that those who are truly blessed and righteous are those

¹⁰² John F. MacArthur, *Matthew 1–7* (MacArthur New Testament Commentary 1; Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 181.

¹⁰³ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 451.

¹⁰⁴ Morris, *Matthew*, 99.

¹⁰⁵ Morris, *Matthew*, 99.

who are humble and hunger and thirst for God's forgiveness and righteousness.

Righteousness and Persecution (Matt 5:10–12)

¹⁰ μακάριοι οἱ δεδιωγμένοι ἕνεκεν δικαιοσύνης, ὅτι αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν. ¹¹ μακάριοί ἐστε ὅταν ὀνειδίσωσιν ὑμᾶς καὶ διώξωσιν καὶ εἴπωσιν πᾶν πονηρὸν καθ' ὑμῶν [ψευδόμενοι] ἕνεκεν ἐμοῦ. ¹² χαίrete καὶ ἀγαλλιᾶσθε, ὅτι ὁ μισθὸς ὑμῶν πολλὸς ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς· οὕτως γὰρ ἐδίωξαν τοὺς προφῆτας τοὺς πρὸ ὑμῶν.

“¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so people persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

The seven beatitudes end with both a warning and an encouragement. Matthew's Jesus warns his followers that they are to expect persecution for the sake of righteousness and on account of Jesus.¹⁰⁶ Just as Israel's righteous prophets were persecuted, so they are to expect the same. Since they are part of the realised and future kingdom of God, they will experience persecution from those not of the kingdom. Their persecutors will not be outsiders like themselves, or Gentiles, but insiders, the religious leaders and their followers, and even their own family members (Matt 10:16–26).

However, they are encouraged to rejoice in persecution because they will be persecuted for the sake of righteousness (Matt 5:11). They are to rejoice because they are living the life of the righteous prophets before them who were persecuted for God and his prophetic message, i.e., for the sake of righteousness. Just like John, Jesus was going to be persecuted, and his righteous disciples should also expect persecution. As Lange says, persecution affirms the disciples' righteousness and their relationship with Jesus.¹⁰⁷

They are not to be saddened or ashamed because of this treatment. They are not to retaliate and defend themselves. They are to be meek peacemakers, even to those who persecute them. Loving one's enemy is also one of Matthew's important teachings, and it is on this that all the law and the

¹⁰⁶ Lange, “The Gospel according to Matthew,” 107.

¹⁰⁷ Lange, “The Gospel according to Matthew,” 107.

prophets hang (Matt 5:43–44; cf. 22:34–40). Matthew’s Jesus tells his righteous followers, “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (5:44). This has to be done genuinely with a pure and clean heart (5:5, 9, 43). This will make them salt and light in the world for the kingdom of God (5:13, and 16–18). As Lange says, even those people who persecute “contribute” to the “blessedness”, which identifies the righteous with God’s prophets.¹⁰⁸ This is the righteous reaction to persecution that the Matthean Jesus expects of his disciples. This is what it means to be a righteous disciple. It is to live the life of the prophets and of John and Jesus himself.

The sin-bearing servant of Isa 52 and 53 was oppressed and afflicted. He was bruised and brought to slaughter as a lamb, and he opened not his mouth (53:7). When Pilate asked Jesus whether the accusations brought against him by the chief priest and the elders were true, he did not reply (Matt 27:11–14). They mocked him, but he did not defend himself (27:29–32). Also, in the garden of Gethsemane Jesus bids Peter not to take the sword because those who do will perish with it. He goes on to say that it would not be difficult to call down twelve legions of angels to deliver him, then adds that he must finish his mission (Matt 26:51–53). The Matthean Jesus exemplifies the righteous life for the righteous, even as the Pilate’s wife described Jesus as “that righteous man” (27:19). True disciples are to be meek, make peace, and rejoice in persecution, for their reward is an eternal inheritance.

From a Jewish covenantal perspective, this looks like a seven-fold blessing for the unrighteous and the cursed (Matt 5:3–12). The self-sufficient and the comfortable, who desire temporary security, happiness, and honour, will have no part in the kingdom of God. As the children of Abraham, the religious leaders should be the light of the world, but they lay heavy burdens on people’s shoulders, “but they themselves will not move them with their finger” (Matt 23:4).

CONCLUSION

Matthean righteousness is not an abstract concept or certain behaviours that are in accordance with the law of God, nor does it mean God’s act of salvation exclusively, although Matthew stands on the fact that the Messianic prophecies are fulfilled, which means salvation for the righteous has come. One cannot conclude that the Matthean Jesus is works-oriented because he

¹⁰⁸ Lange, “The Gospel according to Matthew,” 107.

does not emphasise the righteousness of God. That may be right from a Pauline perspective because Matthew talks explicitly about the righteousness of the righteous more than he does the righteousness of God. But the righteous will also be filled with the righteousness of God (Matt 5:6).

Matthean righteousness is a righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. The Matthean Jesus interprets the *Torah* by internalising its precepts. *Torah* observance involves the entirety of the righteous' life, where righteousness is not equated with mere outward conformity to the will of God but involves obedience from an inward conviction and with pure motives. Righteous acts or obedience are not rendered with pretence or selfish motives. The righteous do not seek worldly approval, applause, or reward. Their rewards are eternal and not temporary.

Matthean righteousness involves a life of radical obedience as exemplified by the lives of the prophets, John, and Jesus himself, and by the treatment that they all received from insiders. Although they came in accordance with God's will and preached his message, they were persecuted and their message was rejected. But, like the prophets and Jesus, the obedience and faithfulness of the righteous will be uncompromised.

The Matthean righteous are persecuted for righteousness' sake and on account of Jesus Christ, but they are to regard this treatment as a great blessing. They will not cease to hunger and thirst for righteousness. The righteous do not react by retaliating. They are meek, peacemakers, they love and pray for their enemies, and they turn the other cheek. They are to be like a light in the darkness, and the salt of the earth. This is the greater righteousness. But in the eyes of religious insiders, like the scribes and Pharisees, the righteous outsiders appear to be cursed sinners, the least in the Jewish community.

For Matthew, anyone who desires to become Jesus' disciple is not exempted from the treatment that the prophets received at the hands of religious insiders, because this is the essence of the life of greater righteousness. Thus, Matthean righteousness is exemplified in the lives of the righteous, in the lives of disciples who hunger and thirst for righteousness, who mourn but are comforted, who are persecuted and falsely accused but, like John and Jesus, honour God's law by not doing away with one iota or dot. This portrait of righteous discipleship should be taken to heart by every person who desires to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Matthean Theology of Righteousness in Melanesia

Blessing and Curse

In Melanesia, it is commonly believed that a follower of Christ is always blessed and happy as opposed to the unbelieving ones. This blessing and happiness mostly concern material increase and progressive life, especially education-wise. So, when a Christian is faced with any tragedy or some unflavoured changes or circumstances she is conceived to have sinned. This is how the Pharisees and scribes perceived life as children of the God of Abraham.

Thus, Matthew's Jesus reinterpreted the Abrahamic promise of Genesis 12:1–3 in the Beatitudes in Matthew. The Matthean Jesus promises his followers peace, rest, and joy not in the absence of turmoil or persecution but amidst all of these. True peace and rest can be found in the presence of unrest and war, just as light is distinguished and appreciated in the presence of darkness.

Honour and Shame

Honour and shame is another aspect of Melanesian culture. Its effects can be seen in the lives of Christians and their children or grandchildren. There is a likelihood of compromising with unbiblical social expectations just to avoid shaming in their society or their reputation.

In Melanesia, especially in Papua New Guinea, Christian church leaders and administrator are highly esteemed and respected. We receive the best treatment and sit on the best seats. Thus, there is a danger of using our church leadership authority or power to manipulate, deceive, or obscures the gospel for one's own benefit. For instance, especially in Enga (PNG) many ministries have mushroomed over the years. The founder of these churches have turned their churches into money-making institutions, thus, becoming wealthy in no time. There is the danger also of persecuting those who preach the truth just to avoid shame and retain honour

This hypocritical attitude of the leader is the manifestation of mere outward conformity to religious practices and the law, which is what the Matthean Jesus is speaking against. He internalises the law of Moses by promoting an inner conviction that manifests itself in obedience and acts of righteousness. The Matthean righteousness also rebukes any confidence in

tradition, family line, any status or church leadership role. Thus, those desiring to inherit God's kingdom must repent.

Thus, Melanesians can see all of these issues—blessing-curse mentality of the Pharisees and scribes, practising religious practice for temporal honour and praise, persecuting the righteous and giving them the treatment of outsiders—being counteracted in Matthean theology of righteousness.