

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Sunday morning 25 September 1927

MATTHEW 5 v 6

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after
righteousness, for they shall be filled

Righteousness, in the sense of being just, holy, and conformed to the nature and requirements of God, no man has. We are fallen. There is none righteous, no not one. There is none that doeth good, no not one. Hunger and thirst, in the sense of being in our nature a proper sensation, no man has with respect to God, for all say to Him "Depart from us for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways." So these two singular and beautiful things righteousness and hunger and thirst for it we by nature in the fall of Adam are just destitute of. And if we realise this, if we, as a congregation, realise our condition as fallen men, it is a very solemn thing for us. But the realisation is a very merciful thing, painful though it may be. The fall was a terrible act; it deprived man of all desire for God, all likeness to Him and it brought him into condemnation, and condemnation by God which is just. God's condemnation of a person is a just condemnation and it is a helpless state that condemnation puts a person into and a hopeless state as under a just law. Helplessness and hopelessness belong to us as fallen men. Helplessness, we may think excusable, but it is not so. It is part of our sin. If helplessness were excusable in our case then there might be some little hope, but it is not excusable. Therefore we are in this condition: "By the law shall no flesh be justified." The more this is believed, the better for the believer of it. The keener the realisation of this, the keener will be the appreciation of the gospel when the gospel is known. The law and the gospel stand in these two positions or relations, that the law cuts a man down, condemns him to death, leaves him no way of escape, brings him in guilty before God and says, "The soul that sinneth it shall die"; it holds out no hope, it shows no way of escape, it preaches God's righteousness in the conscience, and tells the sinner he has no righteousness, and therefore he is condemned to die. The relation of

the gospel to that is this, that when a person is really hopeless in himself, when he realises his condition then the gospel comes in and says, "Ho everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters". And these men live, they are baptised into Christ's death and they live His life having lost their own. They come near to God by Christ. Having been driven out of Eden by the law, having been pronounced unjust, they are justified without the law; they are justified by the free gift and grace of God in Jesus Christ. This great truth invests the text with a great solemnity, and beauty, and suitableness to certain cases. A hungerer, you are distinguished from a man who is not a hungerer. Grace makes a distinction and it distinguishes between one and another, and Jesus in this, His first discourse in His public ministry, enters upon these beatitudes, this being one of them. He says "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness". Not that all do, but some do, and the same He pronounces to be blessed people.

I shall, as enabled, first of all enter a little into our lack of righteousness. It is a very serious lack. Among moral men, an immoral person is very objectionable, and he is repudiated. But before God to be without righteousness - Himself the judge of what is righteousness - this is beyond all expression very solemn, serious. To be without righteousness is to be a sinner. A sinner is a man who transgresses the law. "Sin is the transgression of the law." The law is this, that a man is claimed wholly for God. God's claim is on the entire man, body and soul, with all his affections. Man is claimed by the law for his Creator, and his Judge. The law says God is to be your great end; you are to be devoted to Him; none is allowed before Him and "Beside Me there is no God; I know not any, and that straight rule of the law says now you must live according to this. Give Me yourself, your heart, your soul, your mind, your body, your strength; give all to Me. You are My creature, you are My subject, and this is My requirement of you, My claim on you and to transgress the law in one particular is to break the whole law. "He that is guilty in one point is guilty of all." This lack of righteousness therefore is a crookedness in the mind, a perverseness in the will, a setting of the affections on some improper, some forbidden object. Be it what it may, set before God, it is an idol to the man and therefore the whole man is just lacking in righteousness. Righteousness is being

straight with God, just and pure. It is being a creature without fault. This is what the law requires. God's law requires that a man shall be without fault before the Law Giver, so that when he is tried it shall be found there is nothing in him blameworthy. Is this the law that judges you, that judges me? Is this what God requires of us? Are we to stand perfect before Him in the law being judged by it, or guilty by the law? If this is the case, where is the man that could lift up his face to God and say I am a just person? He is not in this congregation. He may be righteous among men, he may never have cheated anybody, he may never have overcharged anybody in his dealing in business, he may have had always a just balance, and a just measure, but before God there is no man righteous. All are unrighteous, have come short of the glory of God and stand by the law condemned. This being so, it puts the righteousness of the text in a very wonderful light. It illustrates the Word of God: "Justified without the deeds of the law." "We conclude that a man is justified without the deeds of the law". This is the righteousness which is manifested by the law and the prophets. It is that which is acceptable to God; that in which He sees no fault, that conforms to His nature, that is straight with His law, that He Himself must be pleased with because it is according to His nature and according to His law. This is righteousness, something, a state, a condition, in which God Himself can only be pleased. This is our righteousness if we are the Lord's people. Think of it dear friends; it is set before us in the gospel. This is the gospel - "This is the Name wherewith He shall be called, The Lord Our Righteousness" That is the gospel and if we come short of this, we come short of the glory of God, we come short of being accepted. And if we are short there, we are short everywhere. Do you see any beauty in this righteousness, this conformity to God's holy law and will and nature and claim? Do you see in it, heaven? for heaven is in it. The love of God is in it, the grace of Christ is in it, the death of Christ is in it, the resurrection of Christ is in it. Everything is in it belonging to the Person and work of the Lord Jesus, and therefore acceptance is in it, peace is in it, joy is in it, communion with God is in it. All that a creature can need, all that a creature can desire; all goodness, all holiness, all conformity to God, you will find in this righteousness. It is beautifully expressed in one of our hymns:

Righteousness to full perfection
Must be brought
Lacking nought
Fearless of rejection

Did you ever bring it? Did you ever go to God with it? Did you ever plead it before Him, confessing the while your own rags, filthy rags? Let us look at this then. This is that which the gospel sets before a person whose conscience is disturbed, distressed by a discovery of his own unrighteousness. Whose conscience will not let the man rest at all, because the law is in his conscience telling him that he is a lost person. And the gospel, in the Holy Spirit's teaching sets before him this blessed righteousness and says in his conscience now if you are to be accepted of God, saved; if you are to stand well with Him in Eternity; if you are to be in His presence and enjoy heaven; you must have this righteousness imputed to you and upon you. This has an attraction for the person; the attraction is expressed in the hunger and the thirst. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness". In this righteousness is seen the remission of sins, the removal of sin from a person; sin which renders him unjust; sin that cuts him off from God; sin that tells him there is no access to God, no enjoyment of God, no peace with God, no ground of hope for heaven, until sin is removed. This righteousness tells him of holiness; it not only gives a title for heaven, but it has in it meetness for heaven, a meetness that consists in holy affections wrought by the Spirit, the Spirit of God who comes in this righteousness. These things, perceived and seen by faith in the gospel in the Person of Christ, beget this hunger, this thirst. Hunger is a sensation of which each person here is more or less conscious every day. Thirst is also a sensation. Hunger and thirst may be said to be a state of nature. It is perfectly natural to be hungry, to be thirsty. It is not disease; it is nature; nature's craving for nourishment, for sustaining. It is a beautiful thing then that the Lord takes up to illustrate the desire of a sinner for righteousness; this hunger, this thirst. No sight, mere sight, can satisfy the appetite; no scent of water can satisfy thirst. You must eat and drink to be satisfied. Jesus here speaks of this : "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled." Then we may safely say that this hunger, this

thirst, will express a state that is pleasing to God. It may be long before satisfaction comes, but the state is pleasing to God. One might illustrate it thus. A Jew living at a distance from Jerusalem starts with his sacrifice to go to the place ordained for its being offered. Now his journey, may be wearisome to him, but it is a good journey; there is good in it, the aim of it is good, the desire is good, the intention of his heart is good. He goes and longs to reach the priest who shall receive at his obedient hand the sacrifice. The sinner, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, may have many a weary step, many a weary waiting. He cries and thinks sometimes that his prayer is shut out. Though he cries earnestly, he reads holy Scripture, and sees the encouragements there, but he does not receive the power of them, and so he sinks sometimes in great discouragement. But his journey, that is his thirst and hunger, God looks upon and approves of. Hunger is a good thing; it must be so, whatever feeling to the contrary we have, because the Lord here pronounces it blessed. It expresses an aim. Food is the aim of a hungry person; water is the aim of a thirsty person. This hunger and thirst for righteousness then expresses an aim. What is the aim? Is it to be religious? You may easily attain that. Is it to be accepted of God? Then your steps to that may be weary and many, but the steps are good; they are good. God approves of them. He is pleased with every step, that is with every prayer, with every believing look the sinner casts on the cross; with every longing desire the sinner has to be accepted in the beloved, God is pleased, because the soul's desire is to be justified. Justification is God's act on a sinner - bear that in mind - Justification is God's act. No guilty person can justify himself; that is obvious. No natural man would think for a moment that a man who is guilty of a deed can justify himself from that. But God is the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. O what a mercy that the Almighty should arraign a sinner before His Judgement Seat, that He should speak the law into that sinner's conscience, bring the sins of that sinner before Him in the light of the holy law of God, bring the oracles of God to him and make them as a glass in which he shall see himself. And then, when the sinner condemns himself, and says "Woe is me, woe is me for I am undone", and says likewise to God, Thou art justified when Thou speaketh and in what Thou speakest against me, then the Divine Being, the Majesty of heaven, the eternal God, pronounces this person just, and he is

delivered from the law, that being dead wherein he was held. And doubtless, according to Scripture, this is that which every new-born person hungers and thirsts after. There is nobody in the church of the living God that does not find himself hungering and thirsting for justification. To stand unjust before God is terrible. To have this injustice, unjust living, unjust thoughts, in your conscience and to realise that the anger of God hangs over such a person, this is terrible. Then when the same person is just, graciously, clearly taken from under the law and put into the covenant; when, instead of divine frowns, sweet, gracious smiles fall on his conscience; instead of God raking up all his past deeds and setting them before him, he just removes all that he has ever done from him and says that he is a justified person; this indeed is a wonder of heavenly grace, a wonder of the death of Jesus Christ, a great wonder in heaven. Now do you thirst for this? I have set before you in some measure a truth, I doubt not, what you must be if you are going to heaven, a justified person. Have you that before you? Have you that before you? Are you in your own conscience a sinner? Not among men, perhaps, but in God's sight, and in your own view, a sinner. And has there been set before you in the gospel of Jesus Christ this beautiful robe of righteousness whereby and wherein you can be justified? Then I can tell you what you are doing. You are hungering, you are thirsting after justification, can never be satisfied without it. You may have some convictions and some helps; some helps in private, some helps in hearing, but the one thing that will do you good is justification. So speaks the Lord Jesus.

Notice in the next place the gracious promise. "They shall be filled". "They shall be filled". I, the God of all grace and righteousness, will fill them. Which means that they shall have a table spread before them and be made to eat and drink. They said, Oh when wilt Thou come unto me. They have said, by night on my bed I sought Him whom my soul loveth. I sought Him and found Him not. They have often said that. And now, instead of that hunger pinching them, and that thirst consuming them, they find themselves hearing a voice, and they find their eyes drawn to an Object, Jesus Himself, and they hear the voice saying "Thy sins are all forgiven" and they receive into their hearts this blessed righteousness; they are filled with it. They realise it; it is given to them; it is imputed

to them and their faith receives it and puts it on and they say, each one: "Surely in the Lord have I righteousness and strength". That is the solid, solemn, sweet feeling of the sinner. I, a sinner born, a sinner having lived in sin and been dead to God, I, now blessed with grace, receive this righteousness, and the sinner lays hold on eternal life as Paul speaks to Timothy. "Lay hold on eternal life". And he does it, and in his soul he has a sense of being accepted in the beloved, and that God sees in him neither fault nor blameworthiness. O glorious gospel, blessed gospel, blessed righteousness, when the Lord Jesus becomes to this person, becomes all this to him and he stands perfect and complete before Almighty God.

This being filled tells us of the Spirit's gracious operation; that the Holy Ghost has come to this sinner and performed in him the promised work of Jesus Christ. He has revealed Christ according to the promise: He shall take of the things which are Mine and shall show them to you. How many of us can say that in some measure, at some time, this righteousness filled us?

Now I shall give you two or three of the blessed fruits of this in experience. The first is peace with God, which is called "the peace of God that passeth all understanding". If you have been convinced of sin, if you are now under conviction of sin, and have not the gospel of the grace of God in you, you have no peace. It may at times be set before you but you have, as yet, no peace. Conscience wont let you rest; It is always bringing up something in the light of the Spirit of Truth, something wrong in your life, in your thoughts, wrong in your desires; always something being brought up to you. O what a life a convinced person looks back on and what present things he has also to grieve and annoy him. He sees these things and he has no peace. Now when he is forgiven, justified, he has the peace of God in his soul. No quarrel; there is no quarrel between God and him. He loves God and God loves him and they enjoy each other. Jesus enjoys the presence and the love of a repenting, justified person, and that person enjoys His mercy, melts under His mercy, wonders at His grace, wonders that God could be this and do this. To such a person there is the peace of God. Circumstances may be full of trouble, but they do not trouble his conscience. They may trouble his mind, they may perturb him many and many an hour, they may keep him awake at night,

they may make him wonder what is going to happen to him, to his family, but his conscience, that is not affected; that is peaceful. I know it, so I can tell it you, and the Scripture tells it you. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because He trusteth in Thee." Devils cannot disturb so long as this justification is in your soul, so long as you have peace with God. O what a happy state it is.

The next thing as a sweet fruit of justification is nearness to God. "A people near unto Him". Joseph's brethren were greatly disturbed when they knew that Joseph was living, whom they thought to be dead, and that he was the lord of all Egypt; these guilty brothers. But when Joseph said, "I am Joseph" to them and fell on their necks and kissed them and spake kindly and friendly to them, we read this: "They talked with him." They were near to him; they were near to him. So, when a person is justified, there is a nearness to God. I think it is very gracious of the Lord to speak of the relation between Himself and a justified person in terms of distance. In some way we apprehend what it means to have felt distance from Him. O what distance; guilt is distance, guilt brings death, death is separation. Justification brings the sweet liberty of the gospel and brings the person into the gracious presence of God. Have you been near Him? Have you felt that nearness, as if nothing existed between you and your God and Saviour? As if nothing could ever come in between you now? He brought you near, accepted you, adopted you as a child of His. You see that He has done it in eternity by predestination, and now He has done it in your soul's experience. "Near unto Him." Then spiritually you can accommodate the words of John in his first epistle: That which we have seen and tasted and handled and felt. Say; that which my eyes have seen, and my hand of faith has handled, and felt, and my soul has tasted, having appetite; that, I can say, I declare. Is it not wonderful that any sinner should ever come into such an experience as that? Ah the very belief that it exists, that it is possible, has an attraction to a hungry man, a thirsty man.

And here it is in the next place that the Lord speaks friendly to a sinner. He may prophesy to him of trouble, but it is a friendly word. As this: "In the world ye shall have tribulation". It was a prediction of trouble, but it was friendly for He said: "In Me ye

shall have peace." Do not look for heaven here; I promise you one to come. But I will give you peace, I will be with you, I will never leave you nor forsake you. He may speak to you a word of support, which means you have a friend. He may tell you that your shoes shall be iron and brass and that will say, a rough way, but it wont break your peace, the peace of your conscience. It will just enable you to hold on and look to Him to be supplied with all that you stand in need of. What a mercy then it is to be filled with righteousness and to know the effects which I have just named.

Now lastly look at what the Lord says about these people. Not only in a way of promise, that they shall be filled, but pronouncing them, in their hunger and their thirst, to be blessed people. It says your appetite for God is a blessing. Do you believe it? It says that the pain of hunger is a blessing; that the sensation of a thirst that nothing here can assuage is a blessing. You say, but I am without God. If you desire Him you will not live always without Him. A man, a sinful man in his own apprehension and feeling, fearing that he shall always be without God, shall not die without Him. "They that seek shall find". "To him that knocketh it shall be opened". That is God's word. Blessed are they. And think this; in whose esteem are these people blessed? In God's esteem. They may be despised by the world, they may be hated by the world, they must be, but they are blessed in God's esteem. And do you value the esteem of men more than the esteem of God? What is it to be esteemed of a man whose breath is in his nostrils, whose foundation is in the dust, and who, to-morrow will not be. But O what is it to be loved and esteemed of God, the eternal God, who says, "I go to prepare a place for you and if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you unto Myself". God esteems a man who hungers and thirsts after righteousness to be a good man, a favoured man. Well that is wonderful. Such a man is in the gospel, such a man has his name written in the Lamb's Book of Life, such a man is under the guidance of the Spirit. "He shall guide you into all truth". He shall guide you to the cross; He shall bring you to the fountain of all goodness and mercy. Such a man is a man to be indeed thought well of. We may well think well of those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. We may indeed esteem them for they are the excellent of the earth. God esteems them. They are more to Him than all the world beside. The

whole world is governed in the behalf of these people who hunger and thirst after righteousness. The whole world is just ruled, and measured, and governed for the sake of those people whom God esteems, who hunger and thirst after righteousness. Blessed are they. Blessed in time; their appetite is a blessed appetite. Blessed shall they be in all their troubles since God says, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee. They are a blessed people. And they shall be blessed in their death. "The righteous hath hope in his death." Whatever he may have suffered in the way of despairing feeling, and doubt and fear during his pilgrimage, and his hungering and thirsting, he shall come to a good end. God will be with him in six troubles, nor will He forsake him in seven. He will bring him honourably through all and then at last take him to be with Himself.

Now my friends, if this is so, if this Scripture is true, is it not a mercy to belong to those who hunger and thirst after God? May it not be indeed said that it is a terrible thing to have no desire for God? to be without Him? Search and see how it is with you. Do you want God? Is there anything that you have ever seen in God to make you long to possess Him? Did you ever see eternal deity in the Man Christ Jesus and the love of God in Christ, the grace of God given to Christ, and the glory of the death of Christ? Then blessed are you. O poor sinner, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, saying: When shall I come and appear before Him. My heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God; when shall I come and appear before Him? Search and see if you can find this hunger in yourself. If it be not there, your state is woeful. There is nothing about you that anybody should envy. If you be rich, if you have perfect health, there is nothing in your condition that anybody should envy because you lack an appetite for God. It means this, that you are dead in trespasses and sins, and may the Lord give you a divine life and heavenly teaching.

AMEN.