



The tribe of Issachar understood the times and knew what Israel should do
Issachar Ministries UK seeks to be a people who understand the times, listen to the Lord and know what should be done

Resourcing for Prayer Network **Spiritual Guidelines**

Teaching on the Kingdom

The Sermon on the Mount (v)

***"Blessed are those who hunger
and thirst for righteousness, for
they will be filled"***

(Matthew 5.6)

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The requirements to receive this blessing are to 'hunger and thirst' after righteousness. This gives the impression of being extremely active in seeking righteousness - being half-hearted or only occasionally concentrating on this - say on Sundays - will not be enough. We are conscious that there are many in our world today who are starving and thirsting for food - and we know that this is a matter of life or death. Christians should have the same attitude to desiring righteousness as only those who seriously seek righteousness with all their heart will be satisfied.

But What Is Righteousness?

Righteousness is described in the dictionary as one of the chief attributes of God, alongside holiness and goodness and allied to justice, as portrayed in the Hebrew Bible. The Hebrew root ***tzedek*** appears more than five hundred times in the Old Testament, and the Greek word ***dikaiois*** appears more than two hundred times in the New Testament. Both of these words can be translated as either righteousness or justice.

This then is an attribute of God that we should all be desiring fervently. Abraham was the first person God described as righteous '*Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness*' (Genesis 15:6). Here it implies that a person's actions are justified - that the person has been "judged" or "reckoned" as leading a life that is pleasing to God.

In the Old Testament its chief meaning concerns ethical conduct. Rectitude, which is sometimes used, means morally correct behaviour or thinking. But as we will see, true righteousness is more than this - it is not just following a code of morality - it means to be

in a right relationship with God and with our fellow men. In the Book of Job the title character is introduced to us as a person who is perfect in righteousness (Job 1.1-5) and 2 Peter 2:7-8 describes Lot as a righteous man.

The Psalms tell us *'For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to destruction'* (Psalm 1:6) and the Proverbs recommend *'I walk in the way of righteousness, along the paths of justice'* (Proverbs 8:20).

There are many practical examples in the Bible of how to live a righteous life in our relationships with others - *'Use honest scales and honest weights, an honest ephah and an honest hin'* (Leviticus 19:36) *'When people have a dispute, they are to take it to court and the judges will decide the case, acquitting the innocent and condemning the guilty'* (Deuteronomy 25:1).

Jesus, though, also reminded his listeners in the Sermon on the Mount that righteous laws had already been given and were not to be ignored *'Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven'* (Matthew 5:19). He also warns us *'For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven'* (Matthew 5:20).

The Additional Factor

But just living a 'righteous' and morally ethical life is not sufficient. Matthew goes on in the Sermon on the Mount not only to encourage righteousness and putting this first in our lives ***'But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well'*** (Matthew 6.33), but also to be careful in its outward display; not to boast or elevate ourselves above others; or judge those who are unrighteous in any way. We need to recognise that we are all sinners and are unable to attain true righteousness without a close relationship with God.

Paul writes to the Romans that righteousness comes by faith: 'a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: *'The righteous will live by faith'* (Romans 1:17). He also gives ethical reasons for his own behaviour *'You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed'* (1 Thessalonians 2:10) and then puts it in perspective legally *'My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me'* (1 Corinthians 4:4).

We can all aspire to have right relationships with other people but true righteousness is not something we can attain on our own or in our own strength. The righteous person can be seen as just or right, but can also fail unless he is holding to God and trusting in him (Psalm 33:18-22). Christians recognise, aspire to and possess the righteousness of Christ, because *'God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God'* (2 Corinthians 5:21). In our own strength we can never achieve that right relationship with God (and others) but the nearer we grow into God's likeness the more God's righteousness glows out in our lives and our actions.

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