

The righteousness of Jesus and John the Baptist as depicted by Matthew

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Righteousness forms a significant feature in the first gospel. This article focuses on two of the seven occurrences of this term in Matthew, where it refers to Jesus and John. The argument in this article is that Matthew intentionally uses the word *righteousness* with reference to Jesus and John to shape the lifestyle of his community. Jesus is the central focus of this community's identity. In solidarity with his people, Jesus fulfilled all righteousness. John is described as a figure that rightly recognised Jesus and also fulfilled all righteousness in his teaching and practice. The Matthean community should do the same. Though the word *righteousness* can be used in a soteriological sense, Matthew uses it in an ethical sense. By righteousness Matthew refers to the proper behavioural norms and attitudes for his community. He contrasts the righteousness of his community with that of the scribes and Pharisees as a distinguishing factor.

Geregtigheid van Jesus en Johannes in Matteus. Geregtigheid vorm 'n belangrike motief in die eerste evangelie. Hierdie artikel fokus op twee van die sewe voorkomste van hierdie term in Matteus, waar dit na Jesus en Johannes verwys. Die argument in hierdie artikel is dat Matteus doelbewus die woord *geregtigheid* in verband met Jesus en Johannes gebruik om die lewensstyl van sy gemeenskap te omskryf. Jesus vorm die sentrale fokus van hierdie gemeenskap se identiteit. Jesus het Homself volledig met sy volk geïdentifiseer en alle geregtigheid vervul. Johannes word beskryf as 'n persoon wat Jesus tereg herken het. In sy verkondiging en optrede het hy ook alle geregtigheid vervul. Die Matteus-gemeenskap moet dieselfde doen. Hoewel die woord *geregtigheid* in 'n soteriologiese sin gebruik kan word, gebruik Matteus dit in 'n etiese sin. Met geregtigheid verwys Matteus na die gepaste gedrag en gesindheid vir sy gemeenskap. As 'n onderskeidende faktor, kontrasteer hy die geregtigheid van sy gemeenskap met dié van die skrifgeleerdes en Fariseërs.

Introduction

Righteousness (δικαιοσύνη) is a fundamental term in the Matthean gospel. It plays a significant role in how Matthew describes the function of the Law and the position of his community. The noun δικαιοσύνη [righteousness] occurs seven times¹ in Matthew's gospel. Matthew uses this noun to refer to Jesus, John the Baptist and the disciples. In two cases he contrasts the righteousness of the disciples with that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law. All seven cases reveal remarkable significance and meaning related to Matthew's teaching of the Law:²

- John had to baptise Jesus, for it was proper for them both to fulfil all δικαιοσύνη (Mt 3:15).
- Those who hunger and thirst for δικαιοσύνη, are blessed (Mt 5:6).
- Those who are persecuted because of δικαιοσύνη, are blessed (Mt 5:10).
- Unless the disciples' δικαιοσύνη surpass that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, they will not enter into the kingdom of heaven (Mt 5:20).
- The disciples should not do acts of δικαιοσύνη before men to be seen by them (Mt 6:1).
- The disciples have to seek the kingdom of God and his δικαιοσύνη (Mt 6:33).
- John came in the way of δικαιοσύνη (Mt 21:32).

The argument in this article is that Matthew intentionally utilises the term *righteousness* to define the identity of his community in contrast to outsider groups. Righteousness is used to describe the proper behavioural norms of his community, which distinguish them from outsiders. The

1.This is more than in any other writing of the New Testament, except for Romans and 2 Corinthians (cf. Talbert 1992:747 for the distribution of the word in the New Testament).

2.Whilst this article focuses the use of the noun, δικαιοσύνη, it should be mentioned that the corresponding adjective, *righteous* (δικαιος), occurs 17 times in this gospel. In Mark and Luke there are only two and eleven occurrences respectively. Of the 17 cases there is only one instance where the usage is parallel to Mark and Luke, namely in Matthew 9:13: 'For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners' (parallel to Mk 2:17 and Lk 5:32). Six other cases occur in pericopes or passages with synoptic parallels, but where *righteous* is not used in the parallel passages. These additions in Matthew's versions signify some redactional trend in Matthew's use of the adjective too, but the study of the adjective falls outside focus of this article.

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gospel not only reflects their norms, but also impacts on their identity as followers of Jesus. Therefore, the concept of identity formation in the gospels, will briefly be explained. Thereafter the history of interpretation of the meaning of δικαιοσύνη will be discussed. To gain a better understanding of the possible meanings of this word, its Jewish and Greco-Roman environment will then be considered. With this consideration in mind, two occurrences of righteousness in Matthew will also be investigated. These occurrences refer to both Jesus and John in Matthew 3:15 and to John in Matthew 21:32. They form a wide *inclusio* [inclusion] around the concentration of five occurrences of the word in the Sermon on the Mount, where it refers to the life of the disciples. From this investigation some conclusions will be drawn of how Matthew uses δικαιοσύνη in these two cases to form the identity of his community and to shape their lifestyle. This *inclusio* has implications for how the righteousness of the disciples in the Sermon on the Mount should be interpreted.

Identity formation in the gospels

The study of Burrige (1992) on the genre of the gospels illustrates how gospels shape communities of disciples. He persuasively argues that the gospels belong to the genre of ancient Greco-Roman biographies (βιοι). Such biographies originated amongst groups of people who formed around charismatic leaders and teachers (Burrige *ibid*:80). Typical of this genre, the gospels focus their attention on Jesus of Nazareth. Like the ancient *bioi* [biographies], the gospels do not only instruct and express the adoration of Jesus, but also set models for the audience to follow (Burrige *ibid*:214). Thus, the gospels have a formational function in addition to their informational function. They present Jesus as the expression of the norms of their communities' values (Talbert 1992:749). Accordingly, the gospels are identity-forming and lifestyle-shaping narratives (Carter 2000:8). *Identity* here refers to that which defines the central commitment of the members of the community. It shapes the appropriate way of life, set of practices and behaviours.

Scholars have identified a variety of devices that groups in the Greco-Roman world employed to define themselves and outsiders (Sanders, Baumgarten, Mendelsohn & Meyer 1980–1982; Neusner & Frerichs 1985; Saldarini 1994). Many of these devices can be recognised in Matthew too, as Carter (2000:9–11) has identified:

- Naming: Names such as *disciples* (Mt 4:18–2), *blessed* (Mt 5:3–11), *church* (Mt 16:18; 18:17), et cetera are used to reinforce group identity and to warn them not to be like the other groups.
- Central focus: Commitment to Jesus forms the central focus of the community's identity (Mt 4:19–22; 9:9; 10:1–4; 19:21).
- Claims of exclusive revelation: The gospel presents Jesus as the revealer of God's presence (Mt 1:23; 28:20), will (Mt 5–7; 10; 13; 18; 24–25), reign (Mt 4:17) and forgiveness (Mt 1:21; 9:1–8; 26:28).
- Rituals and association: Worship (Mt 2:1–12; 5:23–24), teaching (Mt 7:24–27), baptism (Mt 28:19), appropriate interaction with other members (Mt 6:14–15; 22:38–39; 18:15–20), et cetera are features that strengthen the identity of the community.

- Social organisation: The community makes decisions about appropriate behaviour and has its own disciplinary structures (Mt 18:15–18).
- Critical of opponents: Matthew vilifies Jesus' opponents by naming them the enemy, hypocrites, blind guides, evil, serpents, brood of vipers, et cetera (Mt 23).
- Apocalyptic eschatology: The righteous and the wicked have two distinct destinies. God will punish the wicked and vindicate the oppressed righteous (Mt 13:24–25; 25:31–46).
- Community definition by origin: The gospel begins with Jesus' genealogy, miraculous conception and early childhood (Mt 1–2). Jesus brings the community into existence (Mt 1:21; 4:18–22; 9:9; 10:1–4).
- Community definition by actions: The five teaching sections (Mt 5–7; 10; 13; 18; 24–25) outline the appropriate actions for the community.

When considering Matthew's use of the word *righteousness*, it appears to describe one of the primary actions or virtues required from the community.

The history of interpretation of righteousness in Matthew

The intention of this article is to demonstrate how Matthew uses the noun *righteousness*' as identity marker. In order to do this, the distinctive meaning of righteousness, as used by Matthew, has to be deciphered. The article will indicate that scholars have defined the meaning of righteousness, but often without distinguishing between Paul and Matthew's use of the word (e.g. Fiedler 1977). In his often-quoted monograph, Przybylski (1980) warns against 'Paulinising' Matthew's use of righteousness. This would imply that one transposes Paul's meaning(s) of δικαιοσύνη into Matthew's use of the word (Reumann 1992:737). Such a transposition does not do justice to Matthew, as it is an established principle that a document should be understood in its own terms. According to basic semantic principles, the meaning of a word cannot be established without its context. A word's meaning is dependent on its relation with its immediate and wider context (De Saussure 1966:82; Cruse 1986; Thiselton 1979:79; Nida & Taber 1974:15). More recently scholars have attended to the distinction between Matthew's use of the word and that of Paul (cf. Hagner 1997).

During the first half of the twentieth century, reformed scholars often read Paul's use of righteousness³ only in soteriological terms⁴ (cf. Ridderbos 1971:171–191; Stuhlmacher 1966). However, the New Testament texts

3.The word δικαιοσύνη is prominent in Paul's writings, as it occurs 57 times in his letters. Much scholarly discussion, without consensus, is currently taking place about Paul's use of this word. Paul uses the term mostly as part of the phrase δικαιοσύνη του θεου, this phrase has traditionally been interpreted to denote God's gracious saving action in forensic and soteriological terms (e.g. Rm 1:17; 3:5, 21; 10:3). Within the same tradition, the word δικαιοσύνη by itself refers to righteousness as a gift accounting to salvation (e.g. Rm 4:5; 1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 3:9; Gl 3:6). In a smaller number of cases, Paul probably also uses the word in an ethical sense (Rm 6:13, 16, 18; 2 Cor 6:14; 9:10).

4.Scholars from the so-called 'New perspective on Paul' also question such a reading of Paul. The 'new perspective on Paul' is an attempt to lift Paul's letters out of the Lutheran-Reformed framework and to interpret them based on what is said to be an understanding of first-century Judaism. It is argued that in the 'old perspective' Paul was understood to be arguing that Christians' good works do not contribute to salvation, only faith. According to the new perspective, Paul was questioning only observances such as circumcision and dietary laws, but not good works in general (Dunn 2008).

must not be read through the eyes of the reformation controversies about righteousness and justification. The result is that Matthew's use of this word is 'Paulinised' with a single soteriological meaning. Such an approach fitted very well with a simplified hermeneutical approach where Romans 1:17⁵ is used as lens to interpret all references to righteousness in the New Testament. This would temper the seemingly strong emphasis on demands in the Sermon on the Mount that, with a shallow reading of Matthew, is difficult to reconcile with his Christological teaching of salvation.

The debate surrounding the meaning of righteousness in Matthew has primarily revolved around the question of whether the word should be interpreted soteriologically or ethically, or on a continuum with elements of both meanings (Betz 1995:130). Does *δικαιοσύνη* refer to a gift of salvation from God on the one extreme, or as an ethical demand on humans on the other extreme? Other questions are whether Matthew uses the term for one single meaning only, or does he incorporate elements of both meanings into the term.

Some earlier scholars interpreted the occurrences of righteousness as *Rechtschaffenheit* in adherence to ethical demands on humans and not as a gift from God (Dupont 1973:305; Hill 1967:124; Strecker 1971:157–187). The acceptance of this interpretation has increased since the publication of Przybylski (1980) and has been adopted in commentaries of Luz (1990:177), and Davies and Allison (2004:327). Fiedler (1977) and Giesen (1982:237–241) posted the opposite by arguing that all occurrences should be interpreted in a soteriological sense as an *Heilsgabe*. In contrast to the viewpoints that Matthew always uses the term *righteousness* in the same sense, some scholars argue that Matthew uses it with different meanings: sometimes as a soteriological gift, and at other times as an ethical demand, or even simultaneously in both senses (Guelich 1982:84–87; Meier 1976:77–80; Reumann 1982:127–135; Schweizer 1976:53–56; Ziesler 1972:144). Ziesler, for example argues that righteousness in Matthew 5:6 refers to God's gift, whilst in Matthew 5:20 it refers to God's demand on man. He (Ziesler *ibid*) concludes:

It is probably no accident that 5:6 precedes 5:20: human righteousness is inadequate, and what is needed is not only a more thorough kind, but one which comes as God's gift to those who long for it. (p. 144)

Similarly, Schweizer (*ibid*:55) remarks that righteousness in Matthew 5:20 'undoubtedly refers to human actions according to the norm of what God's righteousness requires', whilst in Matthew 6:33 it is 'probably to be understood as a gracious gift, given by God in mercy'. The assumption would then be that Matthew does not use the term *δικαιοσύνη* consistently. It is, therefore, often argued that righteousness as demand is subordinate to righteousness as gift (cf. Kertelge 1971:47).

Though there is scholarly disagreement about the meaning of righteousness in Matthew, many scholars (cf. Banks 1974:242;

5. Romans 1:17: 'For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."'

Betz 1995:130; Deines 2004:122; Frankemölle 1997:71) agree that it should be regarded as an important term in Matthew's gospel. Tagawa (1970:149) remarks: 'It is well known, for example, that *δικαιοσύνη* is one of the fundamental concepts in Matthew.' If Matthew uses *δικαιοσύνη* as such a key term, it is an unsatisfying conclusion to regard Matthew's use of the term as loose and inconsistent. He most probably would have used such a key term in a rather defined and consistent manner.

It is helpful to next consider the context in which Matthew used the term in order to illuminate the different meanings of righteousness. Therefore, the meaning of *δικαιοσύνη* will be investigated in its Jewish and Greco-Roman settings. In view of Matthew's undoubted indebtedness to Judaism, the Jewish setting would play a major role in the way Matthew uses the word. However, the word's use in the Greco-Roman context of the first century should also be taken into consideration.

Righteousness within its Jewish and Greco-Roman settings

In an attempt to determine the distinctive meaning Matthew attached to the word, the possible meanings of the word in its Jewish and Greco-Roman contexts are investigated, after which the occurrences where *δικαιοσύνη* is used with reference to Jesus and John are considered.

Righteousness within its Jewish setting

Matthew wrote his gospel within a religious context with conceptual ideas. His use of righteousness would strongly reflect the Jewish understanding of the term (Betz 1995:30; Hill 1967:139). The Jewish scriptures must have made a significant contribution to such a conceptual heritage. Matthew uses this as he frequently (sometimes freely) quotes from the LXX, applies some of the quotations in fulfilment formulae, and builds many of his arguments on motives from the Jewish scriptures (Menken 2004). However, because of the considerable time difference between the Jewish scriptures and the gospel, later terminology developments in the meaning of righteousness should also be considered. Documents from the Dead Sea Scrolls and Tannaitic literature prove to be helpful to discover these developments. The Jewish scriptures provide the point of departure from which the meaning of the term, as found in these later Jewish writings, developed.

Righteousness in the Hebrew Bible

Righteousness in the Hebrew Bible derives from the root *ts-d-q*. The meaning of this root cannot be determined *a priori* [from the outset]. Words deriving from this root occur 523 times in the Hebrew Bible within a wide variety of genres and settings (Scullion 1992:725). Ziesler (1972:20–35) analysed righteousness terminology of *tsedeq* [masculine], *tsedaqah* [feminine] and the adjective *tsaddiq* in the Jewish Scriptures. According to his account, there are 115 occurrences of *tsedeq*, 158 of *tsedaqah* and 208 of *tsaddiq* in the Kittel edition of the Hebrew Old Testament. Quell (1964:175) discovered no

discernable difference in meaning between the masculine and feminine forms of the noun *tsedeq* and *tsedaqah* in the Hebrew Bible. In quite a number of cases where *tsedeq* and *tsedaqah* are used, it carries the meaning of God's saving activity, especially in Deutero-Isaiah, for example, Isaiah 46:13: 'I am bringing my righteousness (*tsedeq*) near, it is not far away; and my salvation will not be delayed' (cf. Talbert 1992:748; Hill 1967:86–98; Ziesler 1972:22–32). However, there are also a number of cases where it refers to good ethical conduct concerning how one stands before the *Torah*, or God (Talbert 1992:748). Significantly, righteous acts and almsgiving are described with all three terms, as *tsedeq* (Is 58:8),⁶ *tsedaqah* (Pr 21:21)⁷ and *tsaddiq* (Ps 112:6).⁸ Out of the 208 occurrences of *tsaddiq*, 186 refer to proper religious human conduct, which is right before God and in line with the keeping of the covenant. In 22 cases it refers to the person of God in terms of either a salvific or punitive aspect, which is particularly prominent in the Prophets.

Righteousness in early Judaism

Righteousness in the LXX: Reumann (1992:737–738) discusses the problems encountered with the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek for use in diaspora synagogues. The range of translators did not always fully understand the Hebrew texts and were not always able to translate all the nuances of the original version. The translation of the *ts-d-q* words with the Greek δικαιοσύνη narrowed down the broader sense of the Hebrew. The Greek word was mostly restricted to justice, which could result in a distortion of the understanding of the meaning of the original version. However, with the use of δικαιοσύνη in the LXX, it was connected with faith and faithfulness and was thus abetted in Hellenistic-Jewish literature

Righteousness in the Damascus document: The texts of the Dead Sea Scrolls are of great religious and historical significance as they preserve evidence of religious developments of late Second Temple Judaism⁹ (cf. VanderKam 2009). Though these documents were specifically located at Qumran, they were actually a collection from a wider area of 972 texts from the Hebrew Bible and extra-biblical documents. These manuscripts generally date from between 150 BCE and 70 CE,¹⁰ which demonstrates Jewish conceptual developments in the times leading up to the writing of the Matthean text. Przybylski (1980:13–38) investigates the

6. Isaiah 58:8: '... your righteousness (*tsedeq*) will go before you'.

7. Proverbs 21:20–21: 'In the house of the wise are stores of choice food and oil, but a foolish man devours all he has. He who pursues righteousness (*tsedaqah*) and love finds life, prosperity and honour.'

8. Psalms 112:5–6: 'Good will come to him who is generous and lends freely, who conducts his affairs with justice. Surely he will never be shaken; a righteous man will be remembered forever.'

9. Second Temple Judaism refers to the religion of Judaism in the era between the construction of the second temple in Jerusalem in 515 BCE and its destruction by the Romans in 70 CE. During this period significant religious developments took place, such as growing interest in the authority of scriptures, the centrality of law and morality, and of apocalyptic expectations.

10. There is no unanimity of opinion about the time span of the development of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The *terminus ad quem* is quite certain, as most scholars agree that the scrolls found in the caves of Qumran were stored there no later than 70 CE – the date of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem (Dupont-Sommer 1961:340; VanderKam 2009:7).

meaning of words connected to the root *ts-d-q* in the Dead Sea Scrolls. He finds that the concept of righteousness is specifically significant in the Cairo Damascus (CD) document, which was a product of the Qumran community as such. The Damascus document comprises two separate sections: the Admonition and the Laws. The Admonition consists of moral instruction, exhortation, and warnings addressed to members of the community, together with polemic against its opponents. The Laws describe the arrangements of the new community, expressed to them by the Teacher of righteousness (cf. Davies 1983). In the Damascus document, Przybylski (*ibid*:17–19) recognises a difference in meaning between *tsedeq* and *tsedaqah*, which is different from that in the Hebrew Bible. The term righteousness (*tsedeq*) developed into a technical term, symbolising everything that is right in the sight of God. Members of the community knew the concept of righteousness through the teaching of the Teacher of righteousness. Those 'who know righteousness (*tsedeq*)' (CD 1:1)¹¹ know what was communicated to them by the Teacher of righteousness (*moreh tsedeq*) (CD 1:11). They do not walk in 'waters of falsehood (*meme kazab*)' (CD 1:15), but 'in the ways of righteousness (*netibot tsedeq*)' (CD 1:16). The Teacher of righteousness teaches the 'precepts of righteousness (*huqqe ha-tsedeq*)' (CD 20:32). Righteousness thus implies the ideal conduct in adherence to God's ordinances. A person who strives to live according to this ideal is regarded as righteous (*tsaddiq*). In contrast, *tsedaqah* is used for God's saving gracious activity and gift of salvation (CD 20:20). By doing *tsedeq*, one shows that one appreciates God's gift of *tsedaqah*.

Righteousness in the Tannaitic literature: It is also helpful to consider the concept of righteousness in the Tannaitic literature (cf. Reumann 1992:739). The Tannaitic period begins with the disciples of Shammai and Hillel, and ends with the contemporaries of Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi, a time span from approximately 10 CE until 200 CE.¹² The Tannaitic literature demonstrates the development of Jewish thoughts during the time of the New Testament and approximately a century thereafter. Matthew's gospel fits into this time frame of development of Jewish thoughts. In contrast to the Hebrew Bible where there is no discernable difference in meaning between the masculine noun *tsedeq* and feminine *tsedaqah*, the Tannaitic literature follows the development of a differentiation of meaning as seen in the Damascus document (Przybylski 1980:39). The noun *tsedeq* is primarily used for all aspects of teaching that is normative for human conduct. The Lord is righteous (*tsaddiq*), and a person who lives according to the norm of *tsedeq* is also considered to be righteous (*tsaddiq*). 'For the Lord is righteous (*tsaddiq*), he loves righteous deeds (*tsedaqot*), so you are righteous (*tsaddiq*)' (Sifre¹³ Dt 49, 11:22). *Tsedaqah* developed a very specific meaning as almsgiving:

Almsgiving (*tsedaqah*) and deeds of loving kindness (*gemilut Hasidim*) are equal to all the commandments of the Law ... almsgiving (*tsedaqah*) is done with a man's money, deeds

11. CD refers to the Cairo Damascus document of the Qumran community.

12. The rabbis who lived during this period are known as the Tannaim.

13. Sifre refers to classical Jewish legal biblical exegesis, based on the biblical books of Numbers and Deuteronomy.

of loving kindness (*gemilut Hasidim*) either with money or personally. (Tosefta Peah¹⁴ 4:19)

Tsedaqah thus became an important part of the *tsedeq* of a *tsaddiq*. By living according to the norm of righteousness, the righteous one demonstrates that he appreciates his relationship with God.

From this investigation of the Jewish context it seems that there has, since the writings of the Hebrew Bible, been a development in the meaning of 'righteousness' words, as reflected in the writings of the Qumran community and of the Tannaim. *Tsedeq* implied the ideal conduct in adherence to God's ordinances. In contrast, *tsedaqah* developed into the meaning of God's saving gracious activity and a gift of salvation. When considering the meaning of δικαιοσύνη in Matthew, this development and differentiation of meaning should be taken into consideration.

Righteousness in its Greco-Roman setting

To gain an understanding of the Greco-Roman meaning of δικαιοσύνη, it is useful to consider the influential ancient analysis of this word as offered by Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics* (Eth. Nic.), book 5 (cf. Rackham 1934; Thom 2009:319). Aristotle makes a distinction between δικαιοσύνη as a general and as a more specific virtue (Eth. Nic. 6.1). This distinction became the norm for later authors. Plato applies δικαιοσύνη to virtuous conduct in general (Pakaluk 2005:182–186). Aristotle qualifies this general virtue as a relational concept indicating the appropriate relationship between two parties (Eth. Nic. 5.1.1129b26–27). After Aristotle, philosophers of the Stoa have described the general social virtue of δικαιοσύνη to include other virtues, such as χρηστότης [goodness], εὐκοινωνησία [good fellowship], εὐσυναλλαξία [fair dealing], and εὐσέβεια [piety] (Schrenk 1964:195–198). Furthermore, Aristotle describes a particular meaning of δικαιοσύνη as justice (Eth. Nic. 5.2.1130a14–b29). Such justice is concerned with the equal distribution of goods. He furthermore distinguishes between distributive and corrective justice (Eth. Nic. 5.2.1130b30–1131a1; 5.4.1132a18). Aristotle further remarks that law is always a general statement intended to cover a wide variety of situations (Eth. Nic. 5.10.1137b11–19). To apply the law to specific cases, δικαιοσύνη is required to recognise the purpose of the law or the intention of the lawgiver (Eth. Nic. 5.10.1137b19–27). A combination of these definitions are found in the philosophical syncretism of the Greco-Roman period from the first century BCE onwards (Thom 2009:334).

Righteousness of Jesus and John in Matthew's gospel

With this background of the meanings of righteousness in mind, the attention now shifts to righteousness of Jesus and John in Matthew 3:15 and 21:32. Matthew used δικαιοσύνη within this Jewish and Greco-Roman context, with the probable emphasis on the Jewish nuances. Though Matthew

does not directly identify his audience, it is generally plausible that it mostly consisted of people of Jewish background (Keener 2009:45). Jesus is involved in the first case, and John the Baptist in both cases.

Jesus was baptised to fulfil all δικαιοσύνη (Mt 3:15)

In Matthew 3:13–17 the author describes the baptism of Jesus. Whilst there are resemblances between Matthew's version of the baptism and that of Mark and Luke, there are quite a number of differences. Only Matthew describes how John tried to dissuade Jesus from baptising him and of how Jesus responded. Jesus responds that he had to be baptised by John so that all righteousness could be fulfilled for them: 'οὕτως γὰρ πρέπον ἐστὶν ἡμῖν πληρῶσαι πάσαν δικαιοσύνην' (Mt 3:15).

It is significant that this passage offers two key Matthean themes, namely *fulfilment* (cf. Menken 2004) and *righteousness* (Davies & Allison 2004:325; Turner 2008:118). Matthew frequently uses the verb *fulfil* to introduce a citation from the Jewish Bible (Mt 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 5:17; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 26:54, 56; 27:9). This confirms that what is happening to Jesus is in accordance to God's will, which has previously been declared in the Jewish Scriptures.

What righteousness means in this context is not easy to decide. One option is to interpret righteousness here as God's salvific activity (as *tsedaqah* is used in the Jewish Damascus document and Tannaitic literature). Accordingly, Jesus' baptism represents the inauguration of Jesus' ministry, which would eventually lead to his redemptive death on the cross. This would imply that the text actually deals with the beginning of Jesus' saving activity as the baptism typifies his death by which justice is effected (Cullmann 1950:15–17). Cullmann referred to Isaiah 53:11¹⁵ in saying that Jesus' baptism prefigured his death through which forgiveness and righteousness are accomplished for believers. Along similar lines, Barth (1963:140) argues that Jesus, by his baptism, entered the path of the passion and resurrection to save his people. Morris (1992:65) is of the opinion that Matthew here pictures Jesus as dedicating himself to the task of making sinners righteous. As Messiah, he would pave the way so that his followers could eventually enjoy eschatological righteousness as gift from God. Meier (1976:79) and Hagner (1992:116; 1993:56) also argue in favour of such a *heilsgeschichtliche* interpretation. An objection against such an interpretation is the use of the plural ἡμῖν. Unless it is a royal 'we', the fulfilment is not by Jesus only. The most likely other candidate is John. Consequently, not only Jesus, but also John needs to fulfil all righteousness (Hagner 1993:56; Talbert 2010:55; Turner 2008:118). This makes it improbable to limit the righteousness in Matthew 3:15 only to Jesus' salvific activity. For John to baptise Jesus, allows both to fulfil all righteousness.

It is also possible to understand righteousness in an ethical sense as *tsedeq* in later Jewish writings and in the Greco-

14.The Tosefta is a compilation of the Jewish oral law from the period of the *Mishna*.

15.Isaiah 53:11: '... by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.'

Roman literature. In New Testament times, δικαιοσύνη had established itself in the moral vocabulary of the Greco-Roman world (Davies & Allison 2004:325). Such an interpretation fits very well with the prominent role assigned to adherence to the Law in Matthew. As Matthew requires righteousness from his community, he would find it important to demonstrate that Jesus himself was committed to total righteousness. Jesus, knowing the messianic prophecies, obediently fulfilled all righteousness. The baptism of Jesus recalls the honourable act of Joseph, who was a righteous man (Mt 1:19). According to this interpretation, Jesus and John would be pictured as being committed to fulfil righteousness by behaving as expected from them. Jesus is depicted as the righteous one (cf. Mt 27:19). He fulfilled all righteousness. John came to perform a specific task in preparing the way for Jesus. By doing this, he also fulfilled righteousness. Both Jesus and John had to act in a way that is faithful to their covenant relationship with God. Jesus and John needed to do what God wanted, and thus fulfilled God's plans set forth for each of them respectively in the predictions of the Jewish scriptures (Eissfeldt 1970:213; Foster 2004:200; Loader 1997:159; Meier 1976:79). Their righteousness 'characterizes proper human response to God, implying faithfulness, obedience, and ethical integrity' (Senior 1998:55). However, this act that fulfilled all righteousness is not meant to be exhaustive, as the aorist of the verb πληρώσει [an ingressive aorist] indicates. This act is rather the beginning of more to follow (Talbert 2010:53). Such an interpretation resonates with the opening words of Matthew 3:1–3,¹⁶ which refers to the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy on the one who will come to prepare the way of the Lord. The impeccable Jesus and John, his messenger, are impeccably obedient. The themes of *righteousness* and *fulfilment* furthermore find their echo in Jesus' statement on the continuing validity of the Law in Matthew 5:17.¹⁷ The righteousness of Jesus and John is what is demanded in the Sermon on the Mount, which is fidelity to the commandments of God as Jesus would interpret them (Beare 1981:99). These considerations make an ethical interpretation of righteousness in Matthew 3:15 very plausible. The righteousness of Jesus and John thus sets the norm for proper conduct. Jesus' messianic life of righteousness, with that of John added to this, provides the extent and direction for his community's life (Stuhlmacher 1986:30). The disciples were expected to follow in their footsteps and to also fulfil all righteousness. Jesus' and John's righteous act would later be balanced in the passage about John who came 'in the way of righteousness' (Mt 21:32) to do what was expected of him, forming a sort of large *inclusio* around the theme of righteousness in the Sermon on the Mount (Talbert 1992:745).

Whilst this interpretation seems likely, it also poses some difficulty. The obvious objection against such an

16. Matthew 3:1–3: 'In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near". This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: A voice of one calling in the desert, "Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him."'

17. Matthew 5:17: 'Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them.'

interpretation would be that there is no command in the Hebrew Bible that might hint towards the necessity for Jesus to be baptised. Baptism is a sign of repentance, whilst the Son of God actually needs no repentance (Hagner 1992:116; Talbert 2010:54). However, with the baptism Jesus humbly identifies himself with God's repentant people as the servant of the Lord (France 2008:100; Van der Walt 2006:152). The Messiah is a representative person and thus embodies Israel. As such, he identifies himself with his people fully and obediently acts out this role (Hagner 1993:57; Mounce 1991:25). Furthermore, read in connection with Matthew 3:1–3, the baptism implies the culmination of the preparation work of John the Baptist. It can, therefore, be argued that John and Jesus as such, carried out the total will of God: John as preparer and Jesus as humble servant of the Lord.

It should be considered that righteousness in Hebrew and Greco-Roman thought refers to actions that are faithful to relationships and commitments (Carter 2000:102; Reumann 1982:12–135). This requires a more nuanced reading of Matthew 3:15. In the Hebrew Bible, God demonstrates his righteousness by acting faithful to his covenantal commitments to deliver his people (Ps 51:14; 65:5; Is 46:13; 51:5–8). God's people accordingly act righteous when they act faithful to covenantal requirements (Ps 72:1, 2, 7). Furthermore, God's righteousness is related to human righteousness. God gives righteousness, which humans perform (Guelich 1982:371–372). The righteousness described in Matthew 3:15 fits this tradition. Jesus and John enact God's saving will. Matthew portrays Jesus and John the Baptist as prototypes who were fully committed towards enacting God's righteousness.

John has come in the way of δικαιοσύνη (Mt 21:32)

Later in his text Matthew again writes about the righteousness of John. Matthew writes that the chief priests and elders, motivated by animosity and a desire to trap Jesus, questioned the source of Jesus' authority (Mt 21:23). Jesus returns the question by asking them about the source of John's authority (Mt 21:25). Jesus then tells the story of the two sons to clarify the priests' and elders' failing to obey God and to warn his disciples not to repeat those same mistakes. The elite's non-responsiveness is further emphasised by Jesus' reference to John the Baptist. Jesus affirms John's authority by stating that John has come in the way of righteousness: 'ἦλθεν γὰρ Ἰωάννης πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἐν ὁδῷ δικαιοσύνης' (Mt 21:32). The metaphor *way of righteousness* comes from the Hebrew Bible and refers to living according to God's just will, for example Proverbs 2:20,¹⁸ 21:16¹⁹ and 21:21²⁰ (Hagner 1995:614; Przybylski 1980:94–96; Strecker 1971:187; Turner 2008:509). It includes the full spectrum of proper response to God, including repentance and good deeds (Senior 1998:238).

18. Proverbs 2:20: 'Thus you will walk in the ways of good men and keep to the paths of the righteous.'

19. Proverbs 21:16: 'A man who strays from the path of righteousness comes to rest in the company of the dead.'

20. Proverbs 21:21: 'He who pursues righteousness and love finds life, prosperity and honor.'

The same phrase is also found in 2 Peter 2:21,²¹ where it clearly refers to righteous conduct. John both preached and exemplified righteousness (France 2008:310). As in Matthew 3:15, righteousness is again used in relation to the coming and performance of John the Baptist. Jesus recalls John's role in proclaiming the 'way of the Lord' (Mt 3:3). Righteousness indicates that John acted faithfully in accord to God's previously declared purposes (Carter 2000:426). Betz (1995:131) fittingly remarks that 'the way of righteousness' in Matthew 21:32 'could just as well describe the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount as a whole'.

Matthew once again portrays John the Baptist as righteous. It is noteworthy that, besides the righteousness of Jesus in Matthew 3:15, only John's actions are regarded as righteous. He is portrayed as the prototype of a follower of Jesus who was fully committed to acting righteous. In the Sermon on the Mount, the disciples are exhorted to similar acts of righteousness.

Conclusion

The author uses righteousness as a key element to describe the proper behavioural norms for his community. Matthew portrays Jesus and John the Baptist as prototypes of those who perfectly fulfilled all righteousness in their ministry (Mt 3:15; 21:31). Those who obey their calls to discipleship must strive towards such righteousness. An individual who wants to be part of the Matthean community needs to be loyal to Jesus. True discipleship is demonstrated by doing the will of God as enacted by Jesus and taught and practiced by his loyal follower, John. They were able to recognise the will of God in specific circumstances.

References to the righteousness of Jesus and John in Matthew 3:15 and of John in Matthew 21:31 form an *inclusio* around the discussion of righteousness in the Sermon on the Mount. Righteousness forms an important theme in this Sermon. Righteousness as demonstrated by Jesus and John is the goal for Jesus' disciples to pursue. Doing the will of God is what Matthew regards as the distinguishing mark of the disciple community. Thus, they would surpass the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. Such righteousness forms part of the definition of the identity of the Matthean community.

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- 21.2 Peter 2:21: 'It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness'

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