

Blessed are those that hunger and thirst for righteousness: Sharpening the ethical dimension of prophetic preaching in a context of corruption

Authors:

Fritz W. de Wet¹
Ferdi P. Kruger¹

Affiliations:

¹School for Ecclesiastical Sciences, North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus, South Africa

Correspondence to:

Fritz de Wet

Email:

fritz.dewet@nwu.ac.za

Postal address:

Internal Box 147,
Potchefstroom Campus,
North-West University,
Private Bag X6001,
Potchefstroom 2520,
South Africa

Dates:

Received: 17 Feb. 2012

Accepted: 19 Oct. 2012

Published: 13 Mar. 2013

How to cite this article:

De Wet, F.W. & Kruger, F.P., 2013, 'Blessed are those that hunger and thirst for righteousness: Sharpening the ethical dimension of prophetic preaching in a context of corruption', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 34(1), Art. #722, 10 pages.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ve.v34i1.722>

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The prevalence of corruption has enormous negative consequences for the ideal of an orderly and peaceful society. Corruption does not only have a destructive impact on socio-economic life, but also on human relationships, value systems and vision for life. With this research the authors described the role of the ethical dimension of prophetic preaching in addressing the apparent lack of righteousness as it manifests in a context of corruption in the South African society. The problem field was explored with the focus on an apparent lack of vision and willingness to hunger and thirst for righteousness in the current manifestation of corruption in the South African society. Normative perspectives from Scripture (attempting to voice the impact of Jesus' words in the Beatitudes, with the focus on Matthew 5–6) were discussed. It is reasoned that Jesus' words pneumatologically proved to be essential in developing a sharpened and action-inducing vision of the righteousness of the kingdom of God breaking through in the praxis of a society struggling with the effects of corruption. The research culminated in the formulation of preliminary homiletic theory with a view to a vision for a kind of prophetic preaching that will be able to activate the consciousness of hungering and thirsting for the righteousness of God's kingdom and lead the believer in a life culminating in blessed nourishment. The ethical dimension of prophetic preaching is anchored in the eschatological sphere, aimed at making the perceiver conscious of the distinct presence of the King, calling his people to a blessed presence in this world and empowering them with his promise of restoration of an abundant life for all.

Introduction

The prevalence of corruption has enormous negative consequences for the ideal of an orderly and peaceful society (Vorster 2011:3). Corruption's bane does not only lie in a destructive socio-economic environment with elements like poverty, crime and displacement as its symptoms. It also corrupts the core of human relationships, value systems and vision of life.

Cilliers (2000:16–18) describes the difficult challenge of the church in a corrupt society, namely dealing with the symptoms of a very deep illness. He anticipates that introducing new laws and more intense measures aimed at punishing those that commit corruption will not solve this problem sufficiently. Heitink (1999:294) and Pieterse (2001:120) also gave thought to this problem. They describe the role of the church in society as a missionary-diaconal presence, pointing out that the church has a role to play in this praxis of corruption by mediating Christ to society. Stark (2007:108) emphasises that the church should concentrate on the transforming power of the kingdom of God in acting out its role in society. Cilliers (2000:14) calls for a kind of intervention by the church that will lead to a change of attitude in society.

In this process of change the church must utilise the power of preaching. In the field of reformed homiletics there is a common point of departure, namely that the Word of God as ministered through preaching has the power to change people's lives. *Sermo dei venit mutaturis* is one of Luther's well-known expressions and indicates the transforming power of the Word (Cilliers 2004:19). Preaching must point to the reality of the working God in people's lives, *praesentia realis dei* (Cilliers 2004:45). Change in a society will take place over a period of time, but in this process preaching is a distinguished mechanism to provide believers with the truth-revealing information of the Gospel. This truth-revealing information is instrumental in changing attitudes (Kruger & Venter 2002:589).

Preaching that ministers the Word of the eternal God to a society in need of change and destined for change can be defined as prophetic preaching. The prophetic voice of the church must be heard and this voice must challenge all the people in society to become deeply involved in addressing this problem (Pieterse 2001:122). Prophetic preaching does not shrink from disclosing

and challenging the corrupt elements that keep the current state of this world from bearing witness to its destiny. In our view the ethical dimension of prophetic preaching works with the eschatological vision that Christians should constantly be called upon to act out a kind of life in their current environment that bears witness to the ultimate restoration and consummation of life at the Lord's return. Shaping the ethical dimension of prophetic preaching comprises of presenting a new, sharpened vision that draws society into new acts by means of a hope-generating dynamic (Cilliers 2000:119; Kok 2010:9.) Presenting a new vision aimed at drawing the audience into new acts involves an element of persuasion. Great care should, however, be taken that persuasion does not deteriorate into manipulation that restricts freedom (Larsen 1989:136).

With this research the authors intend to describe the role of the ethical dimension of prophetic preaching in disclosing and countering the apparent lack of righteousness that exists in the situation of corruption as it manifests in the South African society. A preliminary consideration of the position of the preacher in bringing and shaping the message and praxis of the Gospel in the context of corruption as it manifests itself in this particular context, reveals several problematic areas:

- Preachers find themselves in a situation where pressure is exerted on them to speak a politically correct word. The ethics of silence is the ethics of the status quo.
- Preachers and listeners have to come to terms with the painful consciousness that they may be affected by the attitude and mindset underlying corruption in a deeper sense than they might initially have thought.
- Preachers and their listeners are living in a society where an apparent lack of will to resist and conquer various manifestations of corruption seems to be a major inhibiting factor.

In the first phase of this research the problem of an apparent lack of vision and willingness to hunger and thirst for righteousness in the manifestation of corruption in the South African society is explored. In the second phase, normative vantage points from Scripture (with Jesus' words regarding the blessedness of those that hunger and thirst for righteousness in Matthew 5:6 as key element) are considered. Working from a pneumatological point of departure (the faith perception that the Spirit of Christ creates newness of mind and life through the living Word of God) the authors anticipate that these normative vantage points can prove to be essential in developing a sharpened vision of the righteousness of the kingdom of God breaking through in the praxis of a society struggling with – amongst other destructive forces – the effects of corruption.

In the third phase of the research, preliminary homiletic theory is developed with a view to a vision for a kind of prophetic preaching that will be able to activate the consciousness of this hunger and thirst for the righteousness of God's kingdom and lead the believer to a life culminating in blessed nourishment. In the process, not only will the individual be energised, but it will also trigger anticipatory elements of renewal in society. In developing this theory

we focus on the implications of sharpening the ethical dimension of prophetic preaching for deep-rooted renewal with a surprising scope.

A lack of vision and willingness to hunger and thirst for righteousness in a society deeply affected by corruption

In its current state, the South African sociopolitical landscape finds itself in a tension field of polarity between the promise of righteousness for all on the one hand and an apparent lack of vision and political will to engage the issues that stand in the way of completion of the anticipated reform process on the other hand. Admittedly, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has concluded its mandated task; however, we are only now getting to grips with the unfinished business at hand. We have not yet successfully dealt with the past or overcome racism and economic segregation, nor fully acknowledged and dealt with the human complexities involved. Woven into this legacy are the challenges of health and the AIDS pandemic, crime and corruption, bad housing and poor education, unemployment and land distribution (De Gruchy 2011:3).

The situation can be illustrated by referring to one of the burning issues currently plaguing and destabilising the lives of millions of South Africans, namely poor service delivery. According to Manala (2010:519), it is ironic that the present neglect of service delivery in South African villages and townships comes from the structures of the people's government that came to power in 1994 promising citizens 'a better life for all'. This fact makes it the more painful to the Black citizens who had fought so hard for their liberation and betterment of their lives. Instead, they continue to experience the ravaging effects of poor service delivery, which exacerbates poverty. And this despite the promises made by the newly elected administration under president Zuma's leadership, that service delivery would be improved.

Poor service delivery has a far-reaching effect on the population. Denied effective access to employment, resources or services, communities become disparate, exploited, disadvantaged, marginalised and increasingly vulnerable (Lewis 2011:471).

One of the root causes of the apparent unwillingness to address this issue seems to be an endemic form of corruption that diverts much-needed resources for improvement of service delivery. In its sociopolitical manifestation, corruption can be defined as the diversion of public resources to nonpublic purposes (Basdeo 2010:388). Corruption is the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. It hurts everyone whose life, livelihood or happiness depends on the integrity of people in a position of authority (Transparency International 2011). By aggressively siphoning off funds at source, and by exploitation, acquisition, insider dealing, cartels, price fixing and substandard construction, millions are denied access to their share of the benefits of development (Lewis 2011:471).

The phenomenon of corruption and its effects cannot be limited to the political, economic, social and environmental levels. Corruption is like a cancer that not only destroys the social fabric of society, but also roots itself deeply in the moral and spiritual dimensions of human life, with devastating and paralysing effect. Not only does corruption promote a general lack of trust in institutions and leadership, but it stimulates a perpetual *culture of corruption* that invades all spheres of life (Vorster 2011:3). A culture of corruption implies a corrupted morality (not only in leaders but also in followers) in which a blind eye is turned to the fact that self-gain implies taking from others what is their due. Corruption is then seen as a grey area in a sea of opportunities that can be 'utilised' in order to survive and gain progress in this world. On another level, a deep-rooted culture of corruption releases the corrosive acids of despair and overwhelming cynicism that threaten all efforts to deal creatively with the problems that face us (cf. De Gruchy 2011:2). Dealing with corruption therefore does not only imply replacement of corrupt leaders, but also renewal of culture, renewal of public life and renewal of hearts. In our view, dealing with corruption involves communicating a new way of looking at life and creating a consciousness of the hunger and thirst for righteousness that cannot else but burn in the hearts of humans touched by God's grace.

How can this much-needed renewal be realised whilst probing at the deep level suggested by the analysis of the situation? In seeking a responsible vantage point for engaging at depth with the problem, the authors considered current humanist and theological attempts at addressing the deep-seated presence of corruption in the South African society. De Gruchy (2011:2) envisages the role that a new humanist consciousness can play in a global as well as the South African context. It would be a consciousness that affirms the evolutionary interconnectedness of human beings within the cosmos; it would be relational rather than individualistic; and it would recognise a moral imperative and accountability beyond human self-interest and manipulation. Such an endeavour would also acknowledge that secular and religious humanists today can and should find common cause in the struggle for human dignity, justice and peace, even though they may work from different presuppositions.

Working from the theological vantage point regarding a consciousness in which a moral imperative and accountability beyond self-interest and manipulation can awaken, Manala (2010:529) envisages the role that Black Theology can play. Black Theology, whether in its African or African-American form, is essentially a theology of liberation characterised by the fact that it arose from the experience of one or other form of human oppression, thus focusing attention on the concrete and particular broken relationships in society with a view to transforming society (cf. Maimela 1998:111; Elliot 2000:24). Black theologians, according to Manala (2010:529), will have to encourage and model commitment to corporate governance, cooperation and transparency. Residents must be committed

to participating and making a meaningful contribution to local governance through attendance of meetings and being whistle-blowers in cases of corruption. Residents must be prepared to hold local government authorities accountable. Manala's perspective illustrates the importance of concrete engagement with the problem on the level where it breaches, namely in sociopolitical life. No change can be triggered by criticising from an unparticipating distance.

The question, however, remains how a consciousness and an active longing can be created for a kind of righteousness that reaches beyond mere humanly attainable, outward and temporary restoration of life. In addressing the issue of public holiness in African context, Koopman (2010:385) constructs a Calvinist ethic of holiness. Africa needs people of public and civic virtue:

- public wisdom in contexts of complexity, ambiguity, tragedy and *aporia* [impasse; lack of resources; puzzlement; doubt; confusion]
- public justice in the context of inequalities and injustices on local and global levels
- public temperance in the context of greed and consumerism amidst poverty and alienation
- fortitude amidst situations of powerlessness and inertia
- public faith amidst feelings of disorientation and rootlessness in contemporary societies
- public hope amidst situations of despair and melancholy
- public love in societies where public solidarity and compassion are absent.

Calvin's ethics – according to Koopman – provide directives for the pneumatological formation of such people.

Koopman's theological construction of a Calvinist ethic of holiness emphasises the relationship between divine action and human action in public events of renewal. People who are justified and being sanctified by God's grace in Christ act as God's instruments for the preservation of human society in righteousness. The preserving influence of the Christian life can only proceed from the work of the Holy Spirit (cf. Kok 2010:8). Under the guidance of the Spirit of Christ people are in our view liberated from a spirit of despondency, half-heartedness and cynicism when it comes to countering the culture of corruption. A hunger and thirst for righteousness is triggered in them that cries out for the restoration of the dignity of human life in this life and eschatologically longs for the fulfilment of an unimaginable abundance of life for all that can only materialise at the return of the One that says: 'See, I make all things new' (cf. Vanhoozer 2006:25).

In the next section, working with a pneumatological point of departure (the faith perception that the Spirit of Christ creates newness of mind and life through the living Word of God), the authors explore normative vantage points from Scripture that can be essential in developing a sharpened ethical vision regarding the righteousness of the kingdom of God breaking through in the praxis of a society deeply influenced by corruption.

Normative theory from Matthew 5 regarding the nature of righteousness and the way in which it is embraced

In this section the authors briefly reflect on the kind of words that motivate listeners to hunger and thirst for righteousness as it manifests in the preaching of Jesus (in the Sermon on the Mount as it is described in the Gospel of Matthew). The Gospel of Matthew provides far-reaching perspectives about the quest for righteousness in the hearts, minds and lives of God's church in this world. Viljoen (2009:651) stresses the fact that no other Gospel is so shaped by the thought of the church as it is in the case of Matthew. It could be said that the Gospel of Matthew has a distinct normative influence on the later church. In this sense of the word the Gospel of Matthew could be described as the gospel of the church. In this article the authors will focus on the Gospel's first section of instruction (after four chapters of narrative) aimed at forming the church's vision for its role in the kingdom of heaven (The Sermon on the Mount, chapter 5 to chapter 7). They focus on the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:1–12, and specifically refer to the central position of the fourth Beatitude in activating the hunger and thirst for righteousness in the hearts and lives of Christians.

Basic-theoretical perspectives on the call to righteousness in the kingdom of God as it occurs in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5 – Matthew 7)

The word δικαιοσύνη as it is used in New Testament literature has the meaning of the act of doing what God requires or to do what is right, thereby belonging to a subdomain of moral and ethical qualities and related behaviour (Louw & Nida I 1989:744). Douglas (1986:1030) indicates that the Hebrew word for δικαιοσύνη is יִשְׁרָאֵל. This word has the meaning of *straightness*. This way of doing what is right must be seen in a close connection with the idea of the covenantal relationship between God and humanity and also between people (Bromiley 1985a). In biblical literature the concept of 'righteousness' has to do with a person, their attitude and conduct (Lion Cachet 1994:248). This word is an indication of a relation between persons and the appropriate behaviour that is part and parcel of that relation. Righteousness between people in the society is based on mutual trust and love (Lion Cachet 1994:258).

Matthew uses the word δικαιοσύνη [the act of doing what God requires or to do what is right] seven times in his Gospel – five of these instances occur in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:6, 8, 10, 20; 6:33; Viljoen 2009:659). Viljoen (2009:665) highlights certain implications of this concept of righteousness as it is developed in the Gospel of Matthew for the church:

- The church as new community of God must establish an environment for righteousness.
- The community of believers (church) must be obedient to the will of God and must live a life of commitment.
- The Word of Jesus Christ is a cornerstone in the lives of believers.

- Righteousness as the right lifestyle urges believers to correct practices that are not right.
- Jesus Christ is building his church through the virtue of righteousness.

The preceding conceptualisation clearly visualises a role for the church that should be relevant in her lifestyle, addressing the lack of righteousness in society and shaping her message as a quest for righteousness (Smith 2007:133). The Sermon on the Mount offers a challenge to modern culture and could be regarded as 'a Christian counter-culture' in society (Stott 1999:15). But it should also be made clear that Matthew's conceptualisation of righteousness implies deep-seated change at relational level triggered in a unique spiritual sphere. It does not manifest only as an external conformity to rules, but implies an inner righteousness of heart, mind and motive (Stott 1999:45). Embracing this righteousness takes place in the spiritual sphere of the kingdom of heaven. It is therefore necessary to consider the connection between the concept of *righteousness* and the concept of the *kingdom of heaven* as it emerges in the Gospel of Matthew.

Cloete (1990:26) and Combrink (1985:17) emphasise the close relation between the concept of the kingdom of heaven and the concept of righteousness in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew uses the concept of the kingdom of heaven 34 times in his Gospel. This concept of the kingdom of heaven is the framework for Jesus' words in Matthew 5 – Matthew 7 and also his deeds in Matthew 8 – Matthew 9 (Combrink 1985:29). Floor (1981:26) goes so far as to say that the kingdom of God and righteousness are deployed as synonyms in the preaching of Jesus. It is therefore impossible to speak about the kingdom of God without speaking of the righteousness of that kingdom. In that sense of the word, Floor prefers to speak of 'the righteousness of the kingdom of God'. With this differentiation of Floor (1981:26) in mind, a twofold meaning can be distinguished, namely:

- The righteousness of the kingdom of God is in the first instance a matter of God putting people in the right relation to him and causing them to inherit his kingdom.
- In turn, the inheritors must always seek and strive for the righteousness of the kingdom of God.

In the Sermon on the Mount the concept of the kingdom of God emphasises the dominion of God, whilst the concept of righteousness as a second key concept emphasises the call to people that live in this kingdom (Cloete 1990:26–27). Floor (1981:82–86) indicates that the kingdom of God has also a social dimension. Between the kingdom of God and this world stands the reconciliatory work of Jesus Christ. The church (as God's instrument in this world) forms a unique relationship with society; a relationship of antithesis and solidarity. The church has the calling to live the gospel of the kingdom of God, but also to preach this gospel. Preaching of this kingdom has the power to change people's life's (Floor 1981:100).

Lazare and Van Aarde (2005:930) share this view and indicate that the Matthean Beatitudes expose and challenge existing social, political and religious structures which impose suffering on people. Instead of imposing unrighteousness

on people, there must be a willingness to do what is right (Mt 5:10). The verb *do* [δεδωγμένοι] has also the meaning of *pursuance* of what is right (Day 2010:32). The focus in the Sermon on the Mount is that the church as followers of Jesus Christ must do his will and also act according to the righteousness of his kingdom.

Matthew 5:20 introduces a further dynamic in the movement of thought. The *doing of righteousness* in the kingdom of God must lead to a righteousness that excels [δικαιοσύνη πλεῖον]. The idea of πλεῖον must be seen in contrast to the wrong way of doing righteousness as it manifests in the conduct of the Scribes and Pharisees. The act of exceeding in righteousness should be seen as a new form of righteousness displayed by people who live in the love of Christ (Müller 1990:119–121). The act of exceeding in righteousness could be regarded as the grace of obedience that must grow more and more (Müller 1990:119). Although Matthew 5:20 is formulated in a manner of quantity, the sense of quality should also be considered in this verse (Müller 1990:122). The doing of what is right and new in Christ must lead to exceeding righteousness and must culminate in *you must be perfect* [τέλειοι] as it is emphasised in Matthew 5:48. This command *to be perfect* stands in a close relationship with love. Therefore it has to do with completeness and a consistent way in which love exceeds (Combrink 1985:46). There are also consequences in adhering to the call to be become perfect. Persecution and righteousness stand in a close relation (Mt 10:16, 10:41 and 24:12). In the time of Matthew persecution was a realistic danger in the lives of righteous people (Combrink 1988:188). Righteous people attract persecution, because this particular conduct of life is not always popular (Van Tilborg 1986:41).

Basic-theoretical perspectives on the logic in the Beatitudes and the specific place of righteousness in this part of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1–12)

This section is aimed at understanding the context of Jesus' reference to *hunger and thirst for righteousness* in the Beatitudes. Lazare and Van Aarde (2005:929) explain Jesus' concern for the crowds against the background that he was confronted with the realities of his time. Jesus saw the devastated condition of the people and therefore acted and created space for people to speak and act (Lazare & Van Aarde 2005:929). In this process he proclaimed God's kingdom of justice and righteousness and also comforted people who suffered from injustice.

With the exception of the ninth Beatitude, the Beatitudes could be divided in two quartos, namely Matthew 5:3–6 and Matthew 5:7–10 (Cloete 1990:71). The ninth Beatitude differs from the first eight. Field (1999:564) indicates that the 'ninth' Beatitude refers back to the previous eight. The first eight Beatitudes (with the ninth as concluding statement) are an important transition to the rest of the Sermon on the Mount and an important introduction to the public ministry of Jesus (Combrink 1985:44; 1988:187–188). The accent on righteousness is prominent in the first eight Beatitudes and forms the end of the first quarto and also a hinge to the next quarto (Mt5:6). The second quarto also ends with the accent of righteousness (Mt 5:10; Cloete 1990:71). Combrink

(1988:187) sees a definite structure and also a balance in the deployment of the Beatitudes:

- The first eight Beatitudes are formulated in the third person, followed by the ὅτι – subordinate clause. The ninth Beatitude differs from the previous eight, because it is formulated in the second person plural and the specific structure of the first eight Beatitudes is also not evident.
- In the first four Beatitudes the alliteration of the letter π is notable. There is also a clear indication of vowel rhyme in the first eight Beatitudes.
- A prominent use of inclusion is noticeable in the first eight Beatitudes.
- Beatitudes one and eight have the same subordinate clause. The subordinate clause in the first and eighth Beatitude is formulated in the present tense, whilst the other subordinate clauses of Beatitudes two to seven are formulated in the future tense. Matthew therefore distinguishes between a future and present dimension when he speaks about the kingdom of God.

Stott (1999:46–47) distinguishes a spiritual progression of relentless logic in the development of the first four Beatitudes, which means that each of the Beatitudes leads to the next and presupposes the previous one:

- The first step in this chain, activated by Jesus' words full of truth and grace, is the acknowledgement that the true human state before God amounts to being poor in spirit. To be poor in spirit is to acknowledge one's utter spiritual poverty, one's spiritual bankruptcy (Stott 1999:39). The word πτωχοὶ [*poor*] is a strong word that denotes economic poverty even to the point of being a beggar (Lazare & Van Aarde 2005:931). To the people in whose lives any means of holding oppressive power is absent, there is the attribution of the highest power, because they take God's kingship seriously (Van Tilborg 1986:42). To be poor in spirit is to know how dependent you are on God and is also the first and right attitude towards God (Du Rand 2001:128).
- The second Beatitude gracefully guides God's people to mourn over the cause of this state, namely their sin and fallen nature. The word πεινῶντες refers to affliction that is acute and is often externalised by tears and lamentations (Lazare & Van Aarde 2005:933). Believers must bewail the true impact of their sinfulness before their Lord (Stott 1999:42).
- The third Beatitude guides the mourning soul from a previously unbroken, hardened and rebellious state to a broken state of becoming meek, humble and gentle.
- In the fourth Beatitude there is a certain kind of progression. The humbled spirit does not leave the believer in a despondent state of mind, thinking that nothing good can come from this life. A sense that the destructive and fruitless cycle of sin can be broken by the presence of the kingdom of heaven in this world is awakened in the heart. A consciousness of a hunger and thirst for righteousness begins to ache in a heart renewed by God's grace as it is expressed in the living words of Jesus. If believers acknowledged and confessed their sin, they can't leave it there. A deep hunger and thirst for a right relationship with God that is reflected in a life of doing what is right, is activated in their consciousness.

In the last four Beatitudes the focus shifts from the attitude of men towards God to their attitude towards their fellow human beings (Stott 1999:47). Matthew 5:6 could be regarded as an awakening of the priority to hunger and thirst for righteousness in order to find fulfilment in a meaningful life that is pleasing to God. The strong desire for righteousness burning in the heart, mind and motive must culminate in meaningful deeds in the conduct of daily life and not merely waste away in external conformity to rules (Stott 1999:45). Hungering and thirsting for righteousness is an important hinge pertaining to the right attitude towards other human beings in society, starting with mercifulness as it is reflected in the fifth Beatitude (Cloete 1990:72). Hungering and thirsting for righteousness can therefore be seen as an important trigger for activating and sustaining mercifulness in society (Cloete 1990:74). Hendriksen (1982:275) shows that the fifth, sixth and seventh Beatitudes describe the work of God in the hearts of believers. Those who constantly hunger and thirst for righteousness can therefore turn to others, showing mercy and acting as peacemakers. They are not deterred, even though they are persecuted and their lives threatened (Hendriksen 1982:275).

The human acts involved in recognising one's poverty of spirit, mourning, humbling oneself, seeking righteousness, ministering mercifulness, making peace and bearing persecution are drawn into the sphere of the kingdom of heaven by Jesus' words, full of truth and grace, in the Sermon on the Mount. The hidden beauty, profoundness and lasting impact of these acts are disclosed and enabled by the blessed presence of the King and empowered unto fulfilment by his faithful promises. This is a pneumatological statement that proceeds from the faith perception that the Spirit of Christ creates newness of mind and life through the living words spoken by Jesus Christ. Floor (1981:44–45) underlines the importance of the work of the Holy Spirit in the coming of God's kingdom, but also in recruiting followers for this kingdom. Therefore it can be said that the kingdom of God has a pneumatological character. In the context of this article it could also be said that the Holy Spirit is the editor and consummator of the new, profound acts that people are called to make their own and live out in the kingdom of God (Floor 1981:46).

Each quality in the Beatitudes is commended, inasmuch as each person who exhibits it is pronounced blessed [μακάριοι]. The first word in each of these Beatitudes is μακάριοι [blessed]. Bromiley (1985b) lays stress on the fact that this word μακάριοι denotes the distinctive joy which comes through participation in the divine kingdom. Stott (1999:33) remarks that if man reacts to his society in this manner, his life will be a blessed one.

It is significant that the element of promise consistently figures in the *apodosis* of each Beatitude (Coetzee 1984:28; Day 2010:30). It is further noticeable that Beatitudes one, four and eight include the promise of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is therefore given to those who are pursuing righteousness just as it is given to the poor in spirit (Day 2010:30). The promises of the Beatitudes confirm the fullness that the believers' blessed lives are destined for

(Stott 1999:34). These promises are, however, not just a case for the future, but also for the present. The promises in the Beatitudes contain elements of both a present and a future fulfilment. The first-fruits are part of the present, but the full harvest is yet to come. Hendriksen (1982:264) concludes that the Beatitudes disclose more about heaven's favour that is resting upon God's children. In the present, the light of their future bliss is beginning to engulf them.

In this sense the promise that God will satisfy [χορτασθήσονται] the people who hunger and thirst for righteousness (Mt 5:6) has a perpetual meaning. This hunger will be satisfied with the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ (Du Rand 2001:128). One who eats the bread that Christ gives will hunger no more into all eternity. But there is also a future element involved in the promise of satisfaction. Cloete (1990:73) indicates that the expression contained in the word χορτασθήσονται appears regularly in the context of eschatological feasts (Mt 8:11–12; 22:1–10). In its current state this world is still suffering under the effects of the unrighteousness of sinful men, endlessly intent on fulfilling their own sinful desires and in the process taking from others what is their due and abusing the resources of creation. The hunger and thirst caused by this unbearable lack of righteousness will therefore never be fully satisfied, until Christ returns (Stott 1999:46).

Homiletic theory in sharpening the ethical dimension of prophetic preaching

In this section the authors develop initial theoretical markers for sharpening the ethical dimension of prophetic preaching with the aim on activating and pointing to the fulfilling of Christians' hunger and thirst for righteousness in the context of a society caught up in prevailing and deeply-rooted corruption. The authors attempt to:

1. formulate a working definition for prophetic preaching
2. describe the function of the ethical dimension in prophetic preaching
3. sharpen the ethical dimension with the aim on equipping believers for their Christian calling in engaging the problem of corruption effectively.

Defining prophetic preaching

In prophetic preaching the preacher must interpret or render the message of the text in its full implications for the actual context, not turning a blind eye to the challenges implicated in a situation like for instance the current prevalence of corruption in the South African society (Pieterse 2001:96). Prophetic preaching amounts to aligning the living message of the biblical text with the world in its current state and destiny. Prophetic preaching therefore involves hermeneutical interaction with the text in a critical-creative manner (Müller 1996:65). Pieterse (2001:95) formulates the following guidelines for prophetic preaching:

- In prophetic preaching the preacher becomes a mouthpiece of the dynamic and acting God.

- In prophetic preaching the preacher interprets the crisis in society with a critical but creative touch in terms of the promises in God's Word to open new and creative options to the hearers.
- Prophetic preaching demands a prophetic style with a close relation between courage and compassion.

The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us (Brueggemann 1978:13). McMickle (2006), resonating with Brueggemann's line of thinking, remarks:

In the Old Testament the 'royal consciousness' represents the deeply entrenched forces –political, economic, social or religious – of Israel. These are the status quo, and they only offer to people a vision of the future that allows them to remain in power and requires that the masses of people remain marginalized in society. The work of the prophet is to combat that single vision and to show that God can and will bring about a future different form that envisioned by the ruling elite. (p. 11)

In a context of an apparent reluctance to engage with the challenges of prophetic preaching, Tubbs Tisdale (2010:3) asks searching questions: Why is it that we are sometimes tempted to substitute another God for the God of justice of the Scriptures? Why do we avoid speaking truth in love regarding some of the burning issues of our day? And why are we often fearful of what becoming prophetic witnesses will mean for our lives? In attempting to get to grips with the problem field opened up by these questions, Tubbs Tisdale (2010:10) indicates seven hallmarks of prophetic preaching:

- Prophetic preaching is rooted in biblical witness: both in the testimony of the Hebrew prophets of old and in the words and deeds of the prophet Jesus of Nazareth.
- Prophetic preaching is counter-cultural and challenges the status quo.
- Prophetic preaching is concerned with the evils and shortcomings of the present social order and is often more focused on corporate and public issues than on individual and personal concerns.
- Prophetic preaching requires the preacher to name both what is not of God in this world (criticising) and the new reality God will bring to pass in the future (energising).
- Prophetic preaching offers hope of a new day to come and the promise of liberation to God's oppressed people.
- Prophetic preaching incites courage in its hearers and empowers them to work to change the social order.
- Prophetic proclamation requires of the preacher a heart that breaks with the things that break God's heart; a passion for justice in the world; the imagination, conviction, and courage to speak words from God; humility and honesty in the preaching moment; and strong reliance on the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

In our view, the essence of prophetic preaching is that it proclaims the biblical message critically in a society that tends to deviate from its God-given form and destiny, in the process equipping Christians to radiate the light of the kingdom of heaven and its righteousness revealingly and energisingly with a view to refocusing the world on its destiny in a restored relationship with God.

The function of the ethical dimension in prophetic preaching

Several authors in the research fields of practical theology, ethics and homiletics describe the need for integrating the ethical dimension in bringing the Word of God into living, change-inducing contact with society and its issues (Van Wyk 1987; Stott 1982, Nurnberger 2005; Firet 1978; Meyer 2006; De Klerk & De Wet 2008; Hendriks 1991). Smelik (1967:67) remarks: 'Homiletics without ethics is empty and ethics without homiletics is blind.' Without a clear vision of its ethical dimension (with its strong imperative for doing what is right), preaching can become one-dimensional in the sense of only teaching sound doctrine isolated from reality or telling evocative stories aimed at making the gospel attractive or accessible without necessarily making a call for change in the world that we live in (Long 2009:18).

At its heart the ethical dimension places preachers and their listeners in the presence of the living God and his will for their lives. The domains of homiletics and ethics complement each other regarding the message of obedience to God (Cilliers 2000:20). Burger (1996:23) uses the word *Anspruch* [claim] to explain that the Word of God also requests a deed of obedience from hearers. Under the word obedience he understands the manner in which hearers of the Word of God, appropriate the grace of God for themselves (Burger 1996:24).

Incorporation of the ethical dimension is not without its complexities. Cilliers (2000:36) completed a research project on the state of preaching in South African context and found that just a few sermons in his investigation contained an ethical dimension. His research results revealed the following reasons for this unassertiveness:

- The fear of moralistic preaching that regulates society.
- A lack of understanding of the relationship between grace and obedience.
- A fear that differences in understanding certain ethical questions could divide the congregation. Preachers do not want to complicate their sermons.
- Preachers get used to clichés and do not want to adapt to new situations.
- Preachers do not believe wholeheartedly in the power of sermons that can help to change people's lives.
- The danger of legalistic preaching prevents ethical preaching.

Complexities like the fear of moralistic preaching, the danger of turning the biblical message into a social gospel with a mere sociopolitical agenda and the unwillingness to adapt to new situations, should not hinder us from developing responsible theory for the integration of the ethical dimension in homiletic thinking. Zandman (2006) makes an important remark in determining a sound point of departure for developing a responsible view on the integration of the ethical dimension in preaching:

The only ethical framework available to humankind is the Word of God, because only the Word of God holds the metaphysically implanted principles which provide the transcendent guide devoid of human subjectivism. (p. 427)

Van Wyk (1990:286) makes it clear that ethics without norms are non-existent. The Word of God, in the sense of being an expression of his will, is received as the highest standard for making moral choices. The scope and vision for renewal of society in a sermon should always be determined by the pneumatological act of asking for the will of God as he reveals himself in Scripture – an act performed under guidance of the Spirit with the same frame of mind as Jesus Christ for whom it was his bread to do the will of his Father. In our view, preaching with a responsible integration of the ethical dimension regarding God's will for society includes the following objectives:

- *The glory of God.* Preaching must point to the fact that all people must glorify God with their behaviour and life.
- *The welfare of people in the collective sense of the word, but also individually.* Preaching with an ethical dimension is humane, but not humanistic. It always links humanity's vision for its existence and future with God's will and always embeds newness in human acts in the new heart created by God's grace in Christ.
- *The conservation of creation.* Creation will be nurtured and respected with a view to its distinct destiny in God's vision for a new heaven and earth.
- *Resistance against evil and sin.* Evil and destructive forces in society will always be traced to its roots, namely sin (cf. Van Wyk 1990:272–283).

In the context of corruption in the South African society it is inevitable that preaching must spell out the ethical implications of certain deeprooted and prevailing problems in this particular praxis. The church will prove to be unfaithful to its calling when its actions amount to justifying unrighteous practices in society with excuses or half-hearted attempts at revealing their roots. Vorster (2011:13–19) reasons that the main task of the church regarding social problems lies within the domain of ethics and that when dealing with the problem of corruption, those called to minister in the church should apply three specific strategies: They should:

1. **Raise awareness of the problem:** with its strong influence in all spheres of the South African society, the church can strengthen the realisation that corruption is wrong and that behaviour such as greed, nepotism, careerism, favouritism and exploitation is morally untenable and socially destructive.
2. **Address the underlying attitude of self-interest:** In a culture of corruption the promotion of servanthood, embedded in the idea of *Imitatio Christi* (Phil 2:7) is important. The church should teach people that self-interest has limits and that servanthood is the moral directive in interpersonal relations. The true servant will serve the community without the spirit of greed and self-enrichment.
3. **Call for social justice:** Although it is not the task of the church to take over the responsibilities of other social spheres such as civil society, trade unions, political parties or the government, it should be active as a watchdog taking care of the plight of the poor and the marginalised, and the custodian of truth, honesty, fairness and compassion. In this way the church can be deeply involved in combating corruption because she is then dealing with the root causes of the problem.

Preaching with an ethical dimension looks at society with a sharp and wide lens, critically focusing on uprooting unrighteous praxis but also providing a surprising and inspiring scope for a society destined to be renewed far beyond what we can imagine. In the next section the authors develop initial theoretical markers for sharpening the focus of the ethical dimension in prophetic preaching, with the eye on equipping believers for their Christian calling to hunger and thirst for righteousness in an unbearable situation of prevailing corruption.

Sharpening the ethical dimension in prophetic preaching – Anchoring theory in the eschatological sphere

As the authors have concluded in our analysis of the prevailing corruption in the South African society, a deeprooted culture of corruption can seriously impair the willingness and commitment to deal with this problem, due to factors like a corrupting protection of self-interest and overwhelming cynicism. By introducing the theological dimension to the problem field, a key question was posed: How can a consciousness and an active longing be created for a kind of righteousness that reaches beyond the mere humanly attainable, outward and temporary restoration of life? In the authors' normative reflection they considered Jesus' words in opening up a vision of blessed human acts in the context of the presence of the kingdom of God. The hidden beauty, profoundness and lasting effect of acts like active hunger and thirst for righteousness amongst others are disclosed and enabled by the blessed presence of the King and empowered unto fulfilment by his faithful promises. After defining prophetic preaching and stressing the importance of the ethical dimension in calling believers to new acts according to the will of God, the authors now consider theoretical markers for a kind of prophetic preaching that can activate the hunger and thirst for the righteousness of God's kingdom and lead the believer in a life culminating in blessed nourishment – in the process not only energising the individual but also triggering anticipatory elements of renewal in society. The key question in developing these theoretical markers is: How can the vision of the ethical dimension be sharpened for deeprooted renewal with a surprising scope in the pneumatological presence of the King? In the authors' view, a theological theory that facilitates this sharpening of the ethical dimension adequately should be anchored in the *eschatological sphere*.

Several writers stress the need for reckoning with the eschatological sphere in the research field of ethics and homiletics. Thomas (1997:53–60) explains that the word eschatology indicates ultimate things and not just last things. Therefore ultimate reality is not just what will transpire at the end of time, but what God apparently has always sought to make a present reality. The expectation of the future stimulates and empowers human life in the present dispensation (Van Wyk 1998:324; Robinson 2001:93; Janse van Rensburg 2010:226). Hastening the day of the Lord entails an effort to establish peace and righteousness in anticipation

of the *parousia* [presence, arrival or official visit] (Rabali 1992:324). Long (2009:123) thinks that vibrant Christian preaching depends on the recovery of its eschatological voice. Preaching has the task of sharing and spreading the hope in Christ to the world. In the resurrection of Christ, God has already opened the future for his church. Believers shared this hope in Christ and therefore they are a new reality and a new community. The eschatological dimension in preaching unites the facts of the advent (coming) of Christ in us, with us and through us right to end of all things. This view of a new future in Christ also shapes a new vision of the present (Stark 2007:104; Müller 1995:11).

Working with the concept that the kingdom of heaven's scope of righteousness includes renewing praxis in the present state of society demands that the researcher come to terms with different interpretations regarding the high tension between present reality ('already') and coming fulfilment ('not yet') (Bingle & Van der Walt 1991:347). Borg (2003:172) claims that biblical understandings of salvation are focused on this world, not the next. Beker (1982:118), however, reasons that the apocalyptic categories of Paul's interpretation of the gospel function in the tension field between the 'now' of our decision to serve either Christ or the powers of this world on the one hand and the motivating and beckoning power of God's final triumph on the other hand. Without that apocalyptic vision our hope becomes a romantic illusion or a constructive demand, because it collapses God's coming triumph in our present personal stance and willpower. If a biblical view of eschatology falls away in preaching, sermons become legalistic (Cilliers 2004:82). That means that human potential replaces God's promises. In legalistic preaching a distorted apocalyptic view is used to force people in a certain direction with several concealed threats about the future. Changes in people's lives and in society that originate from fear do not last. Threats of the future make one intense, but do not console (Cilliers 2004:83). Long (2009:123) distinguishes between two kinds of eschatology: The first kind depends upon a literalistic grip on biblical images and results in a gospel that is intellectually implausible, stuck in the clouds of a pious and irrelevant heaven that never touches earth. If that is our only option, the retreat into a self-contained present tense is our only ethical choice. The second kind of eschatology, however, allows the eschatological affirmations that 'Christ is risen!' and 'Jesus is Lord!' to exercise tension upon the present tense, generating both judgement and promise, creating the possibility of ethical action in the world sustained by hope.

In the end, sharpening the ethical dimension of prophetic preaching is a case of shifting the focus from what Long (2009:125) calls *progress-preaching* to *eschatological preaching*. Progress-preaching tells people to gird up their loins and use the resources at hand to make the world into a better place, and such preaching necessarily condemns people to failure and despair. Eschatological preaching on the other hand, as Long points out, brings the finished work of God to bear on an unfinished world, summoning it to completion. Eschatological preaching promises a 'new heaven and a

new earth' and invites people to participate in a coming future that, whilst it is not dependent upon their success, is open to the labours of their hands. This vision liberates the listener from a despondent attitude paralysed by the inability to make a difference in a society in which a destructive power like corruption seems to prevail unchallenged. This eschatological perspective restores blurred vision so that the perceiver through the work of the Holy Spirit can become conscious of the distinct presence of the King, calling his people to a blessed presence in this world and empowering them with his promise of restoration of abundant life for all. They are indeed blessed people that can hunger and thirst for righteousness, with the living hope that they will be satisfied far beyond what they could have imagined.

Our initial theoretical markers for sharpening the ethical dimension of prophetic preaching with the aim of activating and pointing to the fulfilling of Christians' hunger and thirst for righteousness in the context of a society caught up in the problem field of prevailing and deeply-rooted corruption, amount to the following:

- A homiletic theory that adequately facilitates the sharpening of the ethical dimension should be theologically anchored in the coming of the kingdom, fully reckoning with its eschatological sphere.
- Sharpening the ethical dimension entails creating a clear vision on the profoundness, beauty and lasting effect of acts of righteousness flowing from a restored relationship with a graceful God that made us taste the righteousness of the kingdom of heaven through Christ.
- After tasting the righteousness of the kingdom of God, the unbearableness of prevailing unrighteousness in society comes sharply and painfully into focus.
- Christians will hunger and thirst to minister God's righteousness and the abundance of life that it is ready to create in their society.
- A sharply focused, far-reaching and hope-filled vision for a future that promises fulfilment of God's righteousness in renewal of all creation opens up in their mind, conquering the spirit of despondency and cynicism.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationship(s) which may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this paper.

Authors' contributions

F.W.d.W. (North-West University) designed the study and wrote the section 'A lack of vision and willingness to hunger and thirst for righteousness in a society deeply affected by corruption'. F.P.K. (North-West University) wrote the section 'Normative theory from Matthew 5 regarding the nature of righteousness and the way in which it is embraced'. Both authors developed the theory documented in the last section 'Homiletic theory in sharpening the ethical dimension of prophetic preaching' on a 50/50 basis.

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