**Sermon on the Mount, Session 8**

**Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,**

**for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”(Matthew 5, 10-12).

**1) Christians should not be surprised when they are persecuted**

1a) We still have the mindset in the UK that we a morally righteous nation where you will be protected and even honored if you are a good Christian person. Most in the churches would feel that if you are persecuted, you must have been doing something wrong, extreme or insensitive and that it’s your fault that you are persecuted.

1b) Most believers feel that if we live a good Christian life we will be respected by society. Why would anyone persecute someone who is seeking to be loving and kind?

1c) Out of all the subjects covered in the beatitudes, Jesus gives the most attention to the subject of persecution. He uses more than 5 times as many words on the subject of persecution than on each of the other subjects. Jesus realised the importance of reassuring his followers that they weren’t doing anything wrong when they were opposed by their family or by the world around them for following Christ.

1d) “Do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. Rather, rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings” (1 Peter 4, 12)

**2) Jesus did not command the church to win the acceptance of the world but to call the world to repentance**

2a) Many churches believe that if we do enough good things in the community, if people see that we are really kind people, that we’re not weird and religious but we’re just like them, then they’ll come flocking into the church.

2b) **We are not called to show people that we are just like them. We are called to show people that they need to change.**

2c) However we should seek to be sensitive and loving in how we share the gospel.

**3) Would Jesus be welcomed or rejected by our society today?**

3a) Probably Jesus would draw crowds seeking for miracles or wanting to experience the spectacle. He would gain a high profile and his teaching would be widely discussed. That doesn’t mean that everyone would agree or follow his teaching.

3b) Jesus wasn’t killed because he preached about the love of God and told people that their sins were forgiven. There was another side to his preaching, one that is not often imitated by today’s churches;

**4) Jesus is not just love. He is also TRUTH AND LIGHT**

4a) Jesus is the **Truth** (John 14, 6). He was **ruthless in confronting evil**, wherever he saw it.

4b) Many people are scared of saying the things they see in others for fear of being rejected, making others angry or being thought to be judgmental by others.

4c) Jesus had no fear of those around him. He knew that his life was in God’s hands and that they could do nothing to him outside of God’s plan (John 7, 30).

4d) Jesus also knew that he was the judge of the world (Matt. 25, 32-32, John 5, 22) and that what he said was true.

4e) When Jesus called the Pharisees “A brood of vipers” it was not an insult. That was what God thought about them.. If they couldn’t come to see that about themselves, they could never be saved. Others needed to understand that too

4f) It is sometimes dangerous to say the plain truth.

4g) Though we all want to be embraced by love, most people don’t really want a bright light shining into their lives, exposing who they really are.

**5) Light or Darkness. Love or Hate. Conversion or Persecution**

5a) Some loved Jesus. Others hated him. “Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.” (John 3:20–21)

5b) Wherever Jesus went, there were two outcomes; **Conversion and Persecution.**

**6) Jesus was separating the light from the darkness**

6a) The first thing that God did in the Bible was to separate the light from the darkness. “the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep …. And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light ….. and **he separated the light from the darkness.”** (Gen 1, 2-4).

6b) The last recorded events in the Bible tell of Jesus coming back to the earth to separate the light from the darkness (Rev. 19-20)

6c) Jesus’ ministry on the earth was separating the light from the darkness. He confronted people with a choice that forced them to move towards light or darkness.

For example cleansing the temple or healing on the Sabbath.

6d) Jesus pushed people to choose and took away their middle ground. “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.”

(Matt 12,30). If they see the light and don’t choose it, they have chosen darkness.

6e) Jesus never went anywhere and left the people unmoved. Though some chose to ignore him, there were always those who were drawn to the light and those who wanted to extinguish the light.

**7) Christians should be persecuted**

7a) “Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, “

(2 Tim. 3, 12)

7b) “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn “‘a man against his father, a daughter against her mother. (Matt. 10, 34).

7c) We should expect persecution to increase around the world and even to come to our nation as we move into the end times. “All these are the beginning of birth pains. Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me.” (Matt. 24, 8-9).

7d) Persecution of Christians is widespread across the world. Over **200 million believers are denied fundamental human rights** solely because of their faith.

1 in 6 Christians in Africa and 1 in 3: Christians in Asia experience high levels of persecution. Every day over 16 believers are martyred.

7e) Our western culture has been strongly shaped by the Bible and the Christian faith. For example, King Alfred the great incorporated the 10 commandments into the law of the land. Today, however, society is moving away from these values.

**8) Why am I not being persecuted?**

There are two main reasons why Christians in the west are not persecuted;

8a) We are too worldly. We are like Chamelions who try to blend in with our environment. “If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. (John 15, 19-20).

8b) We are motivated more by the Fear of man than fear of God or love for others.

We keep quiet about Jesus, not wanting to upset people or for them to think that we are weird. “Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.” (Luke 6, 26).

8c) Our desire to see people saved needs to become stronger than our desire for people to think we are nice and kind people. We need a fresh vision of what life is like without Christ and of an eternal future in torment in hell.

8d) For persecution to be blessed, it has to be because of **the message of righteousness,** not because youare being rude or disrespectful in the way you are presenting the gospel.

**9) Christians are called to be Salt and Light**

9a) “You are the salt of the earth … You are the light of the world”. (Matt. 5, 13-14).

One of the main purposes for salt in the ancient world, before the days of freezers was to stop meat & fish from going rotten. We are called to stop society going bad.

9b) As the Light of the world we are meant to show society the right way to go. We need to speak up when those around us cross the lines that God has set in the Bible.

9c) If we don’t shine your light into that situation we are responsible for allowing the darkness to increase.

9d) The four areas of conflict with our culture are;

The authority of God’s word;

The uniqueness of Christ; Jesus is the only way

The reality of sin;

God judging people

9e) People will hate you if you challenge the rights that society has given them, especially in the areas related to Abortion, Sex outside of marriage, Homosexuality and Gender issues. If you shine the light of God’s word on those subjects, you will be aggressively opposed by most people. State sponsored persecution is not far away.

**10) How can persecution be a blessing?**

10a) **Persecution shows that you are becoming like Jesus.** “A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also” (John 15, 19-20).

10b) **It is a great privilege to be counted among those who have suffered for Jesus.** “Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us …Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” (Heb.12, 1-3. See also 1 Pet 5, 9).

10c) **Persecution wins you a great reward in heaven**. “Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.”

(2 Cor 4, 17)

“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” (Jim Elliot, Ecuadorian Martyr).

10d) **Persecution helps overcome sin.** Persecution does not leave room for sin that is so easily tolerated in the Western Church. “Whoever suffers in the body is done with sin. As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.” (1 Pet 4, 1-2)

God uses persecution to transform His people. “We rejoice in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance (a deep resolve to pursue and obey God) and perseverance, character (godliness)…” (Rom. 5:3-4)

10e) **The spirit of glory rests upon you when you are persecuted**. There is a closeness to God that comes when you are persecuted that you don’t know any other time. Those churches that are living through persecution testify to a power in their witnessing, a dependency on the Holy Spirit, a nearness of God’s presence that they didn’t have before the persecution. The fastest growing churches in the world today are in Iran and Afghanistan. “If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you” (1 Pet. 4:14).

Richard Wurmbrand "Alone in my cell, cold, hungry, and in rags, I danced for joy every night."