

Blessed are the Persecuted: Matthew 5:11-12

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.

1. This is the only beatitude that Jesus repeats, it's the only beatitude with a command - to 'Rejoice and be glad', it's the only beatitude that gives an explanation. *Why do you think that this is the case?*
2. Jesus makes it clear - if we live according to the beatitudes, persecution is to be expected. Suffering is inevitable. Jesus is not saying: *'Don't be surprised if suffering comes'*. He's saying *'be surprised if it doesn't'*. Discuss
3. Can you think of a time when you experienced persecution / insults because of Christ?
4. Many people bring abuse and criticism upon themselves because of how they live. *Give some examples of how we may do that.*
5. We tend to think that persecution happened mainly in ancient times. But the record keepers state that more Christians were martyred in the 20th Century than in all the previous centuries combined - dating back to Christ. *Why is that?*
6. We talk about persecution from violence & killing. In some countries and cultures, persecution is much more sophisticated. Give some examples of other forms of persecution.
7. Richard Wurmbrand wrote the book 'Tortured for Christ'. He was imprisoned for 25 years for being a Christian preacher. It was strictly forbidden to preach to other prisoners, and understood that anyone caught doing this received severe a beating. He wrote *'A number of prisoners decided to pay the price for the privilege of preaching, so it was a deal: we preached and they beat us. We were happy preaching; they were happy beating us - so everyone was happy.'* **Discuss**
8. In the St George Hare painting, 'The Victory of Faith'. Two naked young women are asleep on a bed of straw, tied to a pillar. In the dark background you can see the glare of hungry lions behind the bars. Tomorrow these 2 women will be thrown to the lions, while the Romans enjoy their sport in the grandstands. Yet they are both sound asleep. *How is this a victory of Faith? Discuss this situation in the light of Romans 8:35-38*
9. Discuss **Hebrews 4:3-10**. How do we enter this place of rest.

James 1:12 *Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.*

Pray for each other as you share about your individual circumstances and difficulties.