

# Matthew 5:10

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[ 0 : 00 ] When was the last time somebody let you know that you do not belong? You do not fit in. ! You are not in. You are not in. You are not in. You are not in. You are not in. You are not longer a part of this family. Whether it's subtly or secretly behind your back or violently, you now know that you do not belong there anymore. I want to speak to you this morning about persecution because it's the last of the Beatitudes that we've been dipping into over the last month in the summer. If you look at verse 10 of Matthew 5, blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. It's another one of these paradoxical promises from Jesus, isn't it? It just sounds so upside down to our normal way of thinking. Blessed are the persecuted. But actually it's the only promise that Jesus pushes that little bit further, isn't it? If you look on in verse 11 and 12, blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven. He pushes this point, doesn't he, on persecution. Notice it is not a question of if, but when you are persecuted, isn't it? And this is pointed directly to his disciples. When they revile you. When they persecute you. This will be your experience, my disciples. This is the Christian experience. This is the mark of a disciple of Jesus Christ. Persecution of some variety. So that is our sales pitch to you this morning if you're not a Christian. This is the Christian experience. Come and be persecuted. Sounds odd, doesn't it? But the strange thing here is Jesus is saying this will be a mark of blessing, of tremendous blessing. Rejoice and be glad in it, Jesus says. The word rejoice means to leap for joy, to celebrate in your persecution. It's so different from the things that we normally hear, isn't it? Even from people who might say they are Christians, from the prosperity gospel. A mark of blessing in that false gospel is prosperity and popularity and prestige. That's how the world normally thinks, isn't it? But that's just so against what Jesus is saying here. Jesus says to his disciples in John's gospel, if they persecute me, they will persecute you. Paul says to Timothy, all who desire to live a godly life will suffer persecution. So this is a subject, it's an issue that is relevant to all of Jesus' disciples, not just some in the world. And so what we need is a robust view of persecution, but as a mark of blessing. We're not wanting to dumb down Christians' suffering this morning in any way, but to see actually the wonderful reason that it happens and its purpose and the reward for persecuted disciples of Jesus.

[ 4 : 06 ] So that when somebody makes it clear that you do not belong in this world, because you are a disciple of Jesus, we can rejoice and be glad as Jesus commands us to.

There are three things that I want us to think about this morning. The reason, the purpose and the reward in persecution. The reason, the reason, the reason, the reason a distinctive life will collide with the world.

That's the reason. A distinctive life will collide with the world. Now Jesus saves this beatitude, this blessed promise, doesn't he, until the end of his list.

I don't think he does that because it's the hardest one, he's sort of trying to keep the worst till the end. But it's because actually living a life in accordance with the first seven beatitudes will mean that you will get the eighth.

It is just the natural consequence of living the authentic Christian life. So the reason for persecution is this distinctive life, ordered and governed by the Lord Jesus.

[ 5 : 24 ] It is how we already live, laid out in his beatitudes, that leads to this persecution. It will provoke the world to respond.

Now if you just go through them, you can see that, can't you, maybe really quickly. I know we haven't gone through all of these. But if you look in verse 3, blessed are the poor in spirit.

Poverty of spirit clashes, doesn't it, with human pride in the world. Just look down again, mourning for sin.

We looked at that a few weeks ago. That just jars, doesn't it, with human arrogance. And the idea that actually we're all fine. We don't need God to sort our sin problem out.

Hungering and thirsting for righteousness. That's totally, totally at odds with our permissive society, isn't it? Meekness clashes against self-assertion.

[ 6 : 25 ] Purity of heart is opposed to all of the compromise and all of the hypocrisy in the world. Peacemaking cuts against the argumentative and the cynicism, doesn't it?

And it just goes on, doesn't it? You see at every point here, the authentic Christian life laid out by Jesus clashes with the world. In every moment.

Because Jesus' disciples live a distinctive, Christ-centered, God-centered life that is lived for the honor of God and not for man. It lives for the blessings that come from him and not in this world. And so it's a drastic contrast. It's a collision with the world. John Stott, the Anglican preacher, said that persecution, Christian suffering, is simply the clash between two irreconcilable value systems. In other words, Christianity lived like this in the world is like chalk and cheese, isn't it? It just does not mix. It's on a collision course.

[ 7 : 39 ] You cannot reconcile them. There will always be a conflict of interests. I hope there are some non-Christians here this morning.

You're really welcome, if that's you. And maybe if you are a Christian, you've got friends, you're in the community. It's good, isn't it, to do that. To love folk who don't know Jesus Christ yet.

And have relationships and friendships. And to love those people. But there is always that sense where there comes a point and there's just a difference.

There is a world of difference between how Christians live their lives and how others don't. And maybe you feel that this morning. Relationships are often fraught with that feeling that you just don't mix.

And when the world lives that sees Christianity like this, there will be a disparity. There will be a conflict. And it will threaten some folk, won't it?

[ 8 : 43 ] As we hunger and thirst for righteousness. And as we mourn for sin. Some will find that unpalatable. They will be convicted.

They will feel guilty. They may even resent you and be hostile to you. You'll be accused of being moralistic and straight-laced.

People might talk behind your back. They might think you're deluded for believing in a God. They might think you're lazy for not working on a Sunday. All sorts of things.

Because you are distinctive. And you are on a collision course with the world. And so Christian persecution, it says to you, actually, you are living the Christian life as it's meant to be lived.

This radical, Christ-centered, upside-down life of blessing, it will clash with the world. And it will provoke a response.

[ 9 : 47 ] And the world will want to say to you, you do not belong here. So if you're persecuted in any way, be encouraged that this is authentic Christian living.

Because you are on a collision course with the world. That is the reason. I want to mention a fairly big caveat, though, at this point. Because not all persecution is caused by our godly distinctiveness, is it?

If we're honest. Jesus says quite clearly here, blessed are you when you are persecuted for righteousness' sake.

Isn't it? That's an important addition. Not all persecution is a mark of blessing. Because not all persecution is for righteousness' sake.

Jesus says here. So you've got to ask, why is it happening to me? What has provoked this? What have I done? What are they angry about?

[ 10 : 51 ] As to why I'm being persecuted? It is not good to be persecuted for doing bad things, is it? Augustine said it's not the punishment that makes the martyr, but it's the cause.

Do you see? It is not simply because we might get a hard time that we are doing the right thing. It is why we are doing it. The persecution does not tell you about the person's cause.

Persecution in itself is not a good gauge necessarily for somebody's orthodoxy. Let me try and explain that.

Some sort of false Christian groups, even some preachers, use this verse, verse 10, to warrant false teaching. Or evangelism that is just abrasive.

And they think it gives them license to be overly aggressive, to be inflammatory, to be arrogant, to be tasteless, to be unloving.

[ 11 : 58 ] And to be quite frank, to be just downright unhelpful. And when they get thrown into prison, or they get abused, or they get egged in the streets, they think that is a divine endorsement of what they're doing.

The Jehovah's Witnesses use this verse, don't they, to endorse their beliefs and behaviour. The Jehovah's Witnesses are not Christians.

They just say that. The more they're sent away, though, from house to house, the more they feel better about what they're doing. Because they get a frosty response, they're annoying people, but they think persecution is a sign that they are doing the right thing.

But it can be an awkward gauge for orthodoxy. So we've got to be careful on this, haven't we? Just because people are annoyed by you, does not mean that you are being persecuted for the right reason.

The persecution that Jesus speaks about here is for the sake of righteousness. It happens because of this biblical, Trinitarian, Jesus worshipping radical life that is meek, that is poor in spirit, that is humble, that hungers and thirsts for righteousness, that grieves over sin and so on.

[ 13 : 26 ] So I just want to have that in mind. But with that in mind, I don't you know what this really is about. You notice, don't you, when other people snub you because you will not cut corners at work.

You're singled out for not getting drunk at university. Your family will not speak to you because of your faith or words.

It is not just physical violence, is it? Persecution. Look at verse 11. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

It's verbal, it's social, it's financial, it's emotional, unfairness and discrimination and snubbing and awkwardness. But when that happens, Jesus says we can rejoice because we know the reason. And it tells us that we're living the authentic Christian life as disciples of Jesus and we're on a collision course with the world. And so we will get a response.

[ 14 : 39 ] Actually, we should be thinking to ourselves, shouldn't we, I should be a bit worried if none of this ever happens to me. That is the reason. That is the reason.

A distinctive life collides with the world. Secondly, the purpose. The purpose, a distinctive life will bring glory to the Father. A distinctive life will bring glory to the Father.

Just drop your eye down to verse 13 to 16 for a second. Jesus here gives us three images, doesn't he, to illustrate the distinctiveness of the disciples in the world.

So you've got the salt of the earth, the light of the world and the light in the house. They're all images, aren't they, of the difference, the contrast that the disciples of Jesus have in the world. The difference they make. This is the distinctive life. He's carrying on the same theme, really. But the important thing is the reaction it gets from the world.

[ 15 : 50 ] Just look at verse 16. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

As the world sees this authentic disciple living way, it will look so different to the world.

It will be bright and tasty. As different as light is from the dark, it looks like it's from another world. It is life, but it's life not as we've seen it or as we know it. It is an alien kind of life. And as they see that, there will be a conflict, there will be a collision, but there will be conclusions made about the people living this life.

And the conclusion will be that Christians have a heavenly Father who should be praised and worshipped.

[ 16 : 55 ] This distinctive life, it says to the world that we have a heavenly Father because we are heavenly people.

And when we are persecuted, you're simply reminding us of the truth that we already know. We do not belong here. Persecution is a heavenly Father. And in turn, Jesus says, they will give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Persecution, it isn't just an unwanted by-product. It is part and parcel of this life that we have to live in this world. It must happen.

it's as if, isn't it we are aliens in the world and we appear in the world and our lives should be so different so alien and people look at us and they say you're not from around here you're like foreigners you're like aliens you're like strangers and if you try and avoid the persecution and the collision with the world this will not work that is Jesus' point in these three images isn't it if the salt loses its saltiness if the lamp is hidden or the hidden city on a hill they're pointless aren't they the whole purpose of them is to be different and to stand out and to give light and to show or have a contrast with the world around it to give flavour and light to the world around so we must we must we must go through with it because there is a purpose behind persecution and we will be persecuted and the glory of God is at stake and there will be those who draw the right conclusion and praise our Father in Heaven when they see this distinctive life when we don't shrink back I'm sure you most of you know the story of Saul's conversion we're going to be looking at it next week in Holiday Club it's great isn't it he is converted on the road to Emmaus that famous scene where Jesus appears to him in blinding light he meets the risen Lord Jesus but interestingly interestingly in reflection in the book of Acts Paul remembers what happened in that moment he relays that incident to King Agrippa in Acts chapter 26 if you want to follow along it's in Acts 26 verse 13 he said I saw on the way a light from heaven brighter than the sun that shone around me and those who journeyed with me and when we fell into the ground I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language Saul, Saul why are you persecuting me?

[ 20 : 00 ] it is hard for you to kick against the goads he is saying there isn't he that the Lord Jesus before that moment had already been working on him the Lord Jesus had been goading him had been pricking his conscience had been prodding him to turn and praise Jesus now the only time that we've actually heard about about Saul in the book of Acts before his conversion is that scene where he watches the Christian disciple Stephen die he is martyred and he watches and he approves of his death he persecutes Stephen for his Christian faith for the sake of righteousness Stephen dies and he is the one dishing out the persecution he watches as this disciple of Jesus dies in front of him and he does it for his beloved Lord in the same way actually it's very similar to the death of Jesus and he watches this brave man die for the sake of the gospel and I wonder at that moment was the Lord goading him there it must have been mustn't it it must have goaded him to watch this disciple so faithfully and bravely die for the gospel it must have convicted him deep in his soul somewhere it must have challenged him it may have caused resentment and jealousy and even more hostility against the church and for a time he kicked against those goads but in the end he couldn't resist the Lord's command of his life but you see even in Saul's conversion the persecution of a disciple of Jesus when he received it and took it and gracefully bore it it goaded the world around him

Stephen it goads the souls of this world and it convicts them and it shouts to them we have a heavenly father who you need to praise and ask forgiveness from we have a heavenly father and we will respond with gladness and rejoicing in this persecution because we don't belong here we have a heavenly father you know your parents may hate your new faith and you still honour them that shouts to them that you have a heavenly father you're misunderstood and misrepresented and you don't repay evil with evil and it shouts to them you have a heavenly father you may suffer and die and it will say to the world I have a heavenly father and he is worth dying for he is worth putting up with whatever it is that you throw at me he is the one that I fear and love and praise and you need to give him the glory persecution means that you are calling the world to praise your heavenly father you are a worship leader as you are persecuted in different ways when they see your good works

Jesus says that sort of persecution it goads the world and convicts the world and moves them to praise God so if you are getting a hard time for your Christian faith this morning don't think that that is in vain because every time you bite your tongue and every time you show grace and you respond with mercy and every time you're falsely accused and every time you're faced with ignorance and arrogance and you respond with kindness and patience you are living the authentic Christian life and every time you're hurt and laid aside and mistreated and you love your enemies you are calling them to worship you are calling them to praise your heavenly father and they will be moved at times they will be convicted they may resent you and hate you but some of them in the end will join you and will praise your heavenly father they will want to join the aliens as they see this distinctive life displayed before them they will want to be a foreigner they will want to be a blessed disciple of Jesus that's the reason a distinctive life collides with the world it brings glory to the father thirdly the

result the result a distinctive life brings a distinctive reward a distinctive life brings a distinctive reward just look at verse 12 again rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you this is the big incentive isn't it this is the meat this is what we have been looking forward to this is what it's all about a reward a reward

Jesus says it's not the sufferings themselves that are your prize we're not to be masochistic we're not looking for some perverse pleasure in suffering as a Christian and Jesus isn't coy he isn't embarrassed about talking of the prospect of rewards the word can mean wages or salary you know it's the same word that you might use as a merchant in the ancient world a merchant who goes to find expensive goods in another land and you invest all of your money in buying some goods you maybe buy a shipment in Italy or in Africa and you know that if you can get it home it will be a priceless cargo you can sell it at a massive profit but sailing taking cargo around the Mediterranean was a really risky business it was a risky thing to do often cargo was lost in perilous journeys in storms in rough seas you could lose everything but this merchant does not mind a few rough seas he does not mind a few storms he doesn't mind some danger he doesn't mind a lot of suffering when his ship comes into port because of the opulent riches that will follow and you will not mind suffering or persecution when this reward comes in it is a reward given by grace we do not earn it

Thomas Watson said it is a reward as far above your thoughts as it is above your desert the greatest of the greatness of it is opposite to how much you deserve it it is a reward given in grace not merit and the reward Jesus speaks about is very distinctive verse 10 theirs is the kingdom of heaven great is your reward in heaven this is not an earthly reward but a heavenly one it is something above and beyond what this world offers it is to enjoy and behold the kingdom of heaven to enjoy God to go as aliens to the home that we love it is a picture that we get of the disciples of Jesus ushered into

[ 28 : 34 ] God's throne room in the kingdom of heaven and it is a picture of satisfaction if you look at Revelation chapter 7 maybe read it later on it is a great scene of enjoyment and awe joy and wonder and joy and love and peace and harmony and protection as Jesus' disciples are around the throne worshipping God Revelation 7 they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence never again will they hunger never again will they thirst the sun will not beat down on them nor any scorching heat for the lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd he will lead them to springs of living water and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes one writer said that one breath of this paradise will extinguish all the fires of earth it will be wonderful so as we finish has someone made it clear to you that you do not belong because you belong to

Jesus let me close with a quote from the preacher Martin Lloyd James he said by thus persecuting you the world is just telling you that you do not belong to it that you are a man or woman apart you belong to another realm thus proving the fact that you are going to heaven the Beatitudes they are paradoxical aren't they they are upside down in this world they describe a life which collides with this world at every moment and this is authentic Christianity and as we live it out we will provoke all sorts of responses won't we but some will see that distinctive life and they will wonder and they will see that we have a father in heaven who needs to be praised and glorified but others when they see that they will hate us and they will resent us and they will say you do not belong here and actually when they say that they will be right won't they because we are waiting for our wonderful wonderful reward in heaven let's pray

Thank you.