

INTRO

- What is your favourite Christmas album?

READ

Matt 5:10-12

REFLECT & RESPOND

As we close our series on the Beatitudes, Jesus brings it to a sobering conclusion: as followers of Jesus, we should expect persecution, but He also invites us to respond in a radically different way through rejoicing and gladness.

THE REALITY OF PERSECUTION

As we look back on church history and consider the current global persecution of our brothers and sisters in other countries, the reality of religious persecution is real. Here in Canada, we enjoy religious freedom but we can also experience more subtle forms of mistreatment as a result of our faith and convictions.

Qu: have you felt persecuted because of your faith or stance on moral/ethical issues before? If so, what was the situation and how did it affect you?

THE REASON FOR PERSECUTION

Whilst we can experience perceived persecution for bad reasons, Jesus gives 2 good reasons:

1. for righteousness' sake: The Way of Jesus

Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. 2 Tim 3:12

John Stott says, "Persecution is simply the clash between two irreconcilable value systems."

2. on my account: Allegiance to Jesus

Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.... Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. — Jesus, Mt 10:34, 37

Qu: What is your first reaction to the 2 reasons Jesus gives here? Have you seen this happen in your life or another's?

OUR RESPONSE TO PERSECUTION

Jesus confirms the reality of persecution and for good reasons. But he invites us to respond with joy and gladness. Why?

Qu: why do you think Jesus says we should respond with joy at persecution?

Compassion (to suffer with): Persecution unites us to Christ since he experienced the worst of it.

Formation: trials and persecution form us into the image of Jesus more deeply.

Self-Revelation: under pressure, our true colours show. Persecution may reveal our over-value of other's opinions, desire to be liked, comfort (a lack of persecution may also reveal).

Reminder: we are reminded of our dual-citizenship and that in Jesus we have what truly matters.

Qu: in closing, how have the Beatitudes challenged/encouraged you in your faith and pursuit of Jesus?

RESPOND & PRAY

- Check out opendoors.org to learn more about persecuted Christians worldwide and to help you pray for those experiencing extreme persecution in our world.
- Pray for one another to be courageous disciples of Jesus and to engage wisely with those who don't follow Jesus.