



ASKING BETTER QUESTIONS -
THE SERMON ON THE
MOUNT 8

**Blessed are those who are
persecuted because of
righteousness, for theirs is the
kingdom of heaven. (Mt 5:10)**



Initial Questions

- What is *persecution*?
- What form does *persecution* take?
- Who was being *persecuted*?
- What would *persecution* look like today?
- How do you possess *the kingdom of heaven*?
- What is the *kingdom of heaven*?
- Anything else?



What is persecution Biblically?

- On that day a **great persecution** broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. (Acts 8:1)
- Enough trouble to make you want to **move** to a different place.
- Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. But Saul began to **destroy the church**. Going from **house to house**, he dragged off both men and women and put them in **prison**. (Acts 8:2-3)
- Prison.

What is persecution Biblically?

- 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. (Mt 5:11-12)
- Insult, slander and false accusations (all verbal)
- How to respond?
- Rejoice and be glad – not about the persecution, but about the reward Jesus is promising.
- Persecution behaviour is nothing new. What is new is the response of the Jesus follower.



Personal reflection

- Can I relate to “persecution”?
- Have I experienced persecution? What happened?
- How did I feel at the time?
- How do I feel now?
- What helped me at the time?
- Is there anything I wish I knew then that I know now?



Parable of the sower

- But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When **trouble or persecution comes because of the word**, they quickly fall away.
- Importance of having deep roots in your faith.
- What does it take to develop deep roots?
- Ongoing nourishment.
- Intentionality.
- Time.

The world hates you...

- If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. 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 the words I spoke to you: “No servant is greater than his master.” If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. (John 15:18–20)
- Genuine righteousness condemns people by implication; small wonder that people often lash out in retaliation. Christ’s disciples by their righteous living thus divide men: men are either repelled or drawn to our precious Savior. [Carson]
- What should we expect if we are to follow Jesus?
- The real question: Who do you belong to?

**In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in
Christ Jesus will be persecuted, (2 Tim 3:12)**

So, if I'm not being persecuted right now...?

EXTREME PERSECUTION

- 1 Afghanistan
- 2 North Korea
- 3 Somalia
- 4 Libya
- 5 Yemen
- 6 Eritrea
- 7 Nigeria
- 8 Pakistan
- 9 Iran
- 10 India
- 11 Saudi Arabia



VERY HIGH PERSECUTION

- | | | | | | | | |
|-------------|---------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| 12 Myanmar | 17 China | 22 Algeria | 27 Morocco | 32 Burkina Faso | 37 Cuba | 42 Turkey | 47 Kazakhstan |
| 13 Sudan | 18 Qatar | 23 Mauritania | 28 Indonesia | 33 Niger | 38 Ethiopia | 43 Mexico | 48 Nepal |
| 14 Iraq | 19 Vietnam | 24 Mali | 29 Bangladesh | 34 Bhutan | 39 Jordan | 44 Cameroon | 49 Kuwait |
| 15 Syria | 20 Egypt | 25 Turkmenistan | 30 Colombia | 35 Tunisia | 40 Dem. Rep. of the Congo | 45 Tajikistan | 50 Malaysia |
| 16 Maldives | 21 Uzbekistan | 26 Laos | 31 Central African Republic | 36 Oman | 41 Mozambique | 46 Brunei | |

God can use persecution



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- Now those who had been **scattered by the persecution** that broke out when Stephen was killed **traveled** as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and **began to speak to Greeks also**, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.
- Persecution can be a transformational time.

Responding to persecution - Jesus' way

- But the Jewish leaders incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. So they **shook the dust off their feet** as a warning to them and went to Iconium. And the disciples were **filled with joy** and with the Holy Spirit. (Acts 12:50-52)
- Expelled > “Shake the dust” – what does this mean?
- Filled with joy. Why? How?
- Important to understand that persecution is not a loss of dignity. This is why joy is possible.



Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

- Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” (Rom 8:35-36)
- Importance of grasping the Love of Christ.
- Decision to follow Jesus is a decision to give your life over. So if the day comes, the decision has already been made.
- Ps 44:22

Better possessions

- Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you endured in a great conflict full of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to **insult** and ; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You suffered along with those in **prison** and **joyfully** accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your **confidence**; it will be richly rewarded. You need to **persevere** so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. (Heb 10:32-36)
- What's going on here?

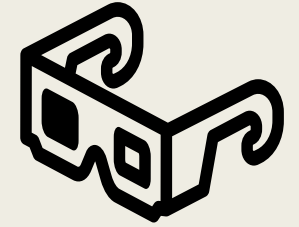


Victor's Crown

- To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown. (Rev 2:8-10)
- Afflictions, poverty, slander, prison.
- Response: Do not be afraid. Be faithful, even to death.
- Jesus' promise of final victory. We need to know this.



Framing



- Dear friends, **do not be surprised** at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, **do not be ashamed**, but praise God that you bear that name. (1 Peter 4:12-16)
- Don't be surprised if persecution comes. Is that in my current thinking/expectations?
- If you are insulted you are blessed (mini-beatitude).
- Don't bring suffering on needlessly by your own sinful actions.
- Do not let shame rest on you. Maintain dignity. God is not ashamed of you.

No Shame

- Shake the dust off your feet. (Acts 12';50)
- If you suffer as a Christian, **do not be ashamed**, but praise God that you bear that name (1 Pet 4:16),
- Do not throw away your confidence (Heb 10)
- Blessed are you when people **insult** you, persecute you and **falsely say all kinds of evil against you** (Mt 5:11)
- Transforming initiative: rejoicing!

For theirs is the kingdom of heaven

- Jesus is bringing his kingdom to earth (kingdom at hand (Mt 4:17)
- Jesus explains how his kingdom works through parables in a way to cultivate our attitudes and expectations.
- Developing the heart attitudes that drive our behaviour.
- Mt 5:3 Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- Being the least, the last, the lost.... And loving it!
- Very different to the kingdom of the world..
- So Jesus is saying : **The one who is willing to graciously accept persecution for my name is the kind of person who is right at home in my kingdom.**

Summary

- Persecution is something the follower of Jesus should expect and have already factored in.
- Can cover verbal, physical, deprivation, prison, death.
- Particular focus on handling shame.
- Don't bring it on needlessly by your own actions.
- Respond in a Christ-like way – no retaliation, rejoicing.
- Develop deep roots now.
- Do not be surprised when it comes.
- Remember Jesus' promises of reward in heaven, victor's crown.

In your own words

**Blessed are the persecuted because
of righteousness, for theirs is the
kingdom of heaven.**

How would you say it in your own words?



Reflection

- Does “persecution” being linked with “being blessed” make sense for me?
- How deep are my roots?
- How would I handle persecution?
- What do I think about the idea of “not letting shame rest on me”?
- Is there anything I am doing that invites persecution unnecessarily?
- What’s my understanding of the kingdom of heaven? Is it now, later or both?