

“The Blessings of Persecution”

“Blessed are those who have been persecuted, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:10)

1. Discuss persecution.
 - a. Where do you see persecution of Christians taking place around the world?

 - b. Where do you see persecution taking place here in the states or even in Kearney?

 - c. What forms of persecution could realistically take shape in our culture over the next 20 years?

2. Read Matthew 5:10-12.
 - a. According to Jesus, what is it that arouses persecution from the world?

 - b. What forms does this persecution take in verse 11? How might these things look in our culture in actual practice?

 - c. What does Jesus say our reaction to persecution should be? Why would this be difficult to practice?

3. Read 1 Peter 4:12
 - a. What were Peter’s readers probably thinking with respect to the persecution they were facing? What might their attitudes have been?

 - b. Why do you think they were surprised?

 - c. How do you think American believers would react if a close friend were beaten or imprisoned for sharing the gospel with a neighbor? How would you react?

4. Read Psalm 50:16-21.
 - a. List at least 8 things that Lord accuses the wicked of doing. Which of these things can you identify in your own life?

 - b. What were these people thinking about God? Can you see ways in which we do this?

 - c. What does this passage say about the human condition?

5. Read John 3:19-20.
 - a. What does this passage say about the unbeliever's affections?
 - b. What does this passage say about the unbeliever's actions?
 - c. How do people typically react when the things or people they love are "attacked"?
 - d. How does this passage relate to John 15:18?
 - e. How should these passages affect our expectations of the world concerning our faith?

6. Read Acts 26:16-18
 - a. What were Paul's circumstances in this section of Scripture?
 - b. For what purpose did the Lord appear to Paul? How does this relate to your purpose?
 - c. According to v 18, what was Paul specifically called to help the Jews and Gentiles do?
 - d. What was the condition of the people he was going to preach to? Whose authority were they under? Why will this matter?
 - e. What does this tell you about the world around us? Why will it matter?

7. Read Matthew 5:10-12 again.
 - a. What does persecution confirm about our identity?
 - b. What does persecution say about our connection to others who have been persecuted?
 - c. Why are these things worthy of rejoicing?
 - d. How should remembering that we belong to Christ's kingdom reorient our hearts?
 - e. How should thinking about our future rewards affect our attitudes in the midst of suffering?
 - f. How might persecution shape our attitudes toward our material possessions, hobbies, relationships, etc.?
8. How are you tempted to react when you are insulted or mistreated due to your faith in Christ? Why are you tempted to react this way? What are you wanting?
9. What steps can you take to prepare yourself to handle persecution well? How can you involve others in mutual preparation?