

Matthew 5:10 "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

We have a description of the character of the Christian in the Beatitudes. A. The Christian is "poor in spirit": Understands the need for God in their life. Not braggart, aggressive, self-asserting, _____, _____, _____. B. The Christian "mourns" his or her sins, loses. Name our failure, sin, grief, give it to God for _____. C. The Christian is "meek". Submits to God's Will. Is _____. Depends on God. Does not have an exalted sense of self. D. The Christian "hungers and thirsts for righteousness". Longs to do the right thing in the eyes of God. Seeks to treat others as he would like to be _____. E. The Christian is "merciful". Mercy triumphs over _____. The merciful can be empowered to extend to others the _____ Christ has extended to us. They choose to _____. F. The "pure in heart" must be a believer in Christ. Has inner moral righteousness. Does not hold ungodly attitudes or _____. Free of hypocrisy. Has single minded _____ to Christ. G. The Christian is a peacemaker not a peacebreaker. Does not stir up _____. Seeks to bring parties _____. They must have the Peace of God, and make Peace with God.

What do you think the world's attitude will be toward such a person? Will they admire them? Seek them out to be president? *These characteristics are righteous characteristics, and if you possess them don't expect the world to honor you.* Rather the opposite, you will be persecuted.

What does righteousness mean? When you are born again God changes your _____. (mind, will, emotions, conscience) He starts getting rid of our pride, jealousy, anger, selfishness and unforgiveness. We begin to see ourselves and others through the eyes of God, framing the world in a biblical view. Seeking to be right before our Holy God.

Our author Dr Denison, gives some information on persecution. According to USCIRF the US Commission of International Religious Freedom "Christians are the most persecuted religious group in the world, and it's accelerating." While 30% of the world's population identifies as Christian, 80% of all acts of religious discrimination around the world are directed at Christians. Of the sixteen countries identified where "heinous and systematic" offenses, including torture, imprisonment, and murder, occur against religious communities, the only religion under attack in all sixteen countries is Christianity. Not every form of persecution Christians' face is likely "heinous and systematic" offenses, **Jesus warns us not to be surprised when we face opposition for our faith. If such opposition is inevitable, our focus needs to be figuring out how to endure it well.**

How would you describe what persecution of Christians most often looks like in our current culture?

_____.

Dr Jeremiah Johnston tells us he and his wife have visited some of the most lethal places on earth in which to be recognized as a Christian. He says "Our interactions with Chinese Christians, who

are courageous enough to survive, forgive, love, and most of all, *believe* amidst atheistic aggression, *has been life changing.*" In countries where Christians experience the most intense persecution, the church is expanding exponentially. (Meaning a lot!!) The more the church is persecuted, the more it is made uncomfortable, the more its mission expands. **Romans 5:20** says "...where sin increased, grace increased all the more." This passage promises a "super-abounding", or "lavish grace".

When we compare the persecution, we've faced to the trials endured by Christians in China, North Korea, or areas of the Middle East, does part of you feel guilty even call it persecution?

While death was always a present threat, most of the time the persecution they endured was in the form of slander, gossip, and ridicule. Enemies of Christ said "all kinds of evil" against them because it was easier to mischaracterize their beliefs than to understand their faith.

1) What are some forms of slander, gossip or ridicule you have heard or endured?

2) It is true that a person that is different may be persecuted, but there is no particular blessedness attached to that. Why not? Give an example of this you are familiar with.

3) Jesus did not say blessed are they who are persecuted who stand for a political cause. Politicians are masters at using people to promote their cause. The spin masters of the world and the world's media can make good look evil and evil look good. There is no blessedness to those in politics. Share an example of this in our present day. No need to name names.

4) We shouldn't be surprised when the world persecutes the righteous. It's been the pattern of the world since the beginning. 1) It began with Cain and Able. John tells us of Cain killing his brother Abel. Because Cain's works were evil and his brother's were righteous. **1 John 3:11-13** 2) Daniel was persecuted for righteousness's sake. King Darius choose Daniel to be president because of his excellent spirit. Many conspired to make charges against him. Read; **Daniel 6:1-5** What stands out most about Daniel in this passage? How does this help us evaluate when we suffer for the sake of righteousness and when we suffer for a different reason? 3) There were many others: Stephen, Jeremiah and of course Jesus.

5) Understand we can be unrighteousness in our pursuit of righteousness. We must be careful that the law of our God, was focused as much on the heart behind our actions as the actions themselves. Check your motives. God does. Any action God calls you to take in the pursuit of righteousness can be done in a righteous and Christ honoring way. It's not OK to be a jerk just because you think you're doing it for Jesus.

6) Not all persecution is because of righteousness. Some of the stereotypes against Christians exist because *they're true.* We can be overly judgmental. We can be closed minded. And hypocritical. We are humans and all humans are prone to those sins. We blind ourselves to sin by believing the pushback we receive is a sign that we're walking with God. When we face persecution take a step back and ask God to help us honestly evaluate why we are being harassed

Enduring the scorn and persecution of others for the sake of Christ takes a level of courage and commitment that cannot be developed in the moment of trial. It requires daily devotion in pursuit