

Small groups – Week beginning Monday 5th October 2020

Introduction/icebreaker

- How was your week? What went well? What were the challenges?
- Can you share 3 things about you that you think nobody in the group would know?

Recap from Sunday's teaching [Blessed life – Matt 5:1-12 esp v10-12]

- Persecution is guaranteed for followers of Jesus! Many of us have not experienced real persecution, but our brothers and sisters around the world do, and times are changing here.
- Persecution means mistreating, causing harm and distress, pain and death; passing laws against you or ignoring laws in order to oppress you; fines, prison, lies, hate, etc.
- Expect persecution – v11, see also John 15:18-21, Matthew 24:9, 2 Tim 3:12, 1 Peter 4:1-5,12.
- Embrace persecution – v12 "be happy about it, be very glad!". There is strong Biblical precedent for embracing persecution – see Isaiah 53:7, Daniel 3:14-18, Acts 4:13-21, Acts 7:59-60.
- Reason for embracing persecution – v12 "Be very glad, for a great reward awaits you in heaven." → Present situation/reality is temporary. This world isn't our home. Promise of eternal life.

Discussion questions

1. Did anything stick out or resonate with you from Sunday's teaching?
2. Have you ever been treated differently because you are a Christian?
3. Why do you think all those people we heard about were willing to accept persecution and even death?
4. How do you think you would respond if you experienced growing persecution?

You may wish to make use of this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mATdRtRCCuM>

Digging deeper

Read Daniel 3. Discuss with the group whatever sticks out to them – you may wish to refer to the following:

- V1 – King Nebuchadnezzar was the King of Babylon. In chapter 2 he had an encounter with God through a dream (see Daniel 2:37-38 & v47) but this was soon forgotten as can be seen from this verse. Short memories is an age-old problem! Verses of scripture are built into the brickwork of our own parliament building, and every hour Big Ben chimes the words of a prayer ("all through this hour, Lord be my guide, and by Thy power, no foot shall slide") but our leaders seem reluctant to acknowledge God let alone look to Him for guidance.
- V2 – The way the approaching persecution would filter down – from a leader who refused to acknowledge God, through the offices and structures of power and government. As it was then, so it is now?
- V6 – "Anyone who refuses to obey..." – anyone who refuses to toe the official line

- V7 – “All the people bowed and worshipped the gold statue” – this simply isn't true. It may have appeared that way, it may have been reported that way...but we see from the following verses that there were three men who refused. Three people in the entire nation of Babylon seems insignificant, but their faithfulness matters. Their faithfulness was seen, and it was recognised and rewarded. It may seem as though you are the only “different” one, the only one following Jesus in your family or your workplace, you may be made to feel as if you're the out of date one for not following the official stance on cultural issues, but your faithfulness matters and is seen and rewarded.
- V15 – “What God will be able to rescue you from my power?” – Nebuchadnezzar lost the battle at this point. Before this, his confrontation was with three men, and he could have won. Now he is in a contest with God, there's only one winner, and this sentence will return to embarrass him! In v17 they will answer that question – “the God we serve is able to save us!”
- V16 – “We do not need to defend ourselves before you” – pick your battles. As mentioned on Sunday, fight persecution if it is on the grounds of race, politics or anything else, but there is Biblical precedent for handling persecution on the grounds of faith differently. Focus on following God faithfully, and allow Him to act on your behalf. God would do a much better job of defending them than they could do for themselves.
- V18 – “But even if He doesn't...” – perhaps the most heroic words in scripture. They know God is able to save them, but their faith isn't dependant on whether he does or not. Faithfulness whatever the cost.
- V25 – “I see four men... and the fourth looks like a god” – This is Jesus, present with them in the fire, releasing them from bondage (we're told twice that they were tied before being thrown in, then they're seen untied), protecting them from all that could harm them, and delivering them completely (to the extent that they don't even smell of smoke). See Isaiah 43:1-2 – God doesn't promise that we won't face fire or persecution, but He does promise His presence, protection and ultimate deliverance. There is no harm or consequence to them from the actions taken against them. When God works a miracle He supernaturally controls every detail so that His power is unmistakable and there is no other possible explanation.
- V28 – The only possible response!
- V29 – See Daniel 2:5, he liked making that threat. Note that Nebuchadnezzar only allows the worship of the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego – he doesn't dismantle his own gold statue or encourage the worship of the one true God in any way. He pays lip service to God (and to defending His followers) but doesn't divert from idolatry in any way. He lists God as one god amongst many, and has to learn the hard way in chapter 4 that this is unacceptable.

Discuss – thoughts, takeaways, tangents...

Prayer

Take time to share prayer requests and pray for each other.