

# Sunday April 19 Service for Swansea & Charlestown Presbyterian Church

## Welcome (Steve Gillard)

Good morning everyone! With Stephen Taylor on annual leave this week Jon Brown is bringing us the message for morning church today. As each week goes by it seems the inevitability of isolation, minimising contact with others, and social distancing is the 'new normal' that we are accepting both as individuals and (on the most part!) by society as well. Going 'with the crowd' in this regard is the responsible and loving thing to do!

However, sometimes as Christians it seems we are going 'against the crowd' on many issues. This may bring personal persecution and hardship. Jon is speaking on the final Beatitude today 'blessed are the persecuted' where we are reminded that living the different life that Jesus teaches in the Beatitudes may lead to conflict with others. So, what should be our response to this persecution? "Rejoice and be glad because great is your reward in heaven" Stay tuned to learn more!

Wishing you a blessed service and the Holy Spirit's guidance as we explore this truth this morning.

Psalm 86:11

"Teach me your way, Lord, that I may rely on your faithfulness; give me an undivided heart that I may fear your name"

## Prayer (Steve G)

Father in heaven, at what remains a difficult and challenging time for many of us we continue to worship you as the God who made us and the God who saves us. We ask for your blessing on our time of worship and fellowship this morning.

When we come before you, we are reminded again that we are sinful people who fall short of You and your glory, and we need your forgiveness. We confess that our thoughts are often impure; our words are sometimes harsh; and our actions are often selfish when we fail to love others as you have taught us to do. In confessing our sins, we can be re-assured that our salvation has been won through the work of Jesus' death and resurrection. We also ask for the Holy Spirit to work in us, to change us and renew us, so we can become more like You.

Help us to now remove distractions this morning and focus our eyes on you. And through this, help us to grow in our Christian walk and our witness for You. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

**Song (modern): Is He Worthy?** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-c6pl6CaiD0>

**Song (traditional): To God Be the Glory** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Ce-BoSQsBR0>

## Announcements

- Focus for April – Easter. With many of being confined to our homes this Easter it gives us more chance to soak in the message of Easter for ourselves. Why not spend extra time meditation, pondering, reflecting and applying the trust to our lives? Why not set up more time to pray? Why not post something about Jesus over social media?
- Please pray for Stephen Taylor and family that they would have a good rest this week and come back refreshed and encouraged. If you have any pastoral needs please contact Jon on 0435456701.
- Next Sunday in the AM (April 26) we are starting a new series in 1 Peter. In the evening we are starting a new series in Genesis 1-3, Creation. Fall. Redemption.

## Pastoral Prayer (Steve G)

Father in Heaven, we bring many things before you today. For our congregation and our nation we pray for those who are suffering directly with the covid-19 pandemic. Pray for provision for those who need it. Pray for our healthcare workers who are busy at the frontline treating those with the virus. Pray for wisdom and skill for medical researchers who are seeking to develop a vaccine. Pray for a simple trust that You are in control of all things.

We thank you for all our families at Charlestown Presbyterian, and our school children now on holidays. Thank you for holiday time and a break from the disruptions of the past term. Thank-you for a time for rest before the new school term commences. We pray also for Stephen Taylor and his family, that they will be well rested from their annual leave, and they will be returned to us strengthened and ready to serve again.

In world events we commit to you the country of Vanuatu after the destruction of cyclone Harold, including our Christian brothers and sisters on the islands of Santo and Ambae. We pray for international relief to reach them quickly, and the provision of food and shelter where it has been lost. We also pray for the Christians in Syria, for peace and provision in times of persecution and hardship.

And again, we pray for a time when we can meet to encourage each other in our Christian walk, to sing your praises, and to boldly live a life worthy of our calling. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

## **Bible Reading – Matthew 5:1-12**

5 Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, 2 and he began to teach them.

He said:

3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit,

for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 Blessed are those who mourn,

for they will be comforted.

5 Blessed are the meek,

for they will inherit the earth.

6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,

for they will be filled.

7 Blessed are the merciful,

for they will be shown mercy.

8 Blessed are the pure in heart,

for they will see God.

9 Blessed are the peacemakers,

for they will be called children of God.

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,

for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

## Sermon: The Joy of Persecution (Matthew 5:10-12) by Jon Brown

Sermon link: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pD8\\_e8IPCKg&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pD8_e8IPCKg&feature=youtu.be)

### Introduction

In the evening service at 6pm we have been going through the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12). These are the much misunderstood and often over looked opening words to Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount. This week we are up to the last one, which is really a double Beatitude (Matt. 5:10-12). It doesn't matter if you haven't heard the other sermons in the series because this one is a kind of summary of the whole.

The Beatitudes are a portrait of the Christian life. They give us the marks of authentic Christianity. It all begins with the disciple on their knees before God. He (or she) confesses that spiritually they have nothing to offer God (see Matt. 5:3). They mourn over their sin and the state of the world (5:4). They have a posture of meekness and gentleness before God and others (5:5). However, they don't wallow in their sins but hunger and thirst for righteousness (5:6).

Next we see the disciple moving out into the community. Our relationship with God shouldn't make us withdraw but engage with the hurting world around us. The disciple should be in the thick of it. Showing mercy to all without prejudice (5:7). Acting with integrity before God and others (5:8). Seeking to make peace in all relationships (5:9).

Yet, far from being thanked for their efforts, the disciple is persecuted. Hear these words from Jesus in Matthew 5:10, "**Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.**"

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German pastor who was executed by the Nazis in Germany during WWII, wrote a book called, *The Cost of Discipleship*. Commenting on the Beatitudes he says this, "With every Beatitude the gulf is widened between the disciple and the world." And the inevitable result is persecution. The grand theme is that those who belong to the kingdom of heaven will be persecuted. So let's look together at these all important words of Jesus under three headings:

1. The Kind of Persecution
2. The Kick of Persecution
3. The King of Persecution

## 1. The Kind of Persecution

### a) What it is not...

It's important that we understand the kind of persecution Jesus is talking about. First of all let's look at what it is not. Notice Jesus doesn't say, "Blessed are those who are persecuted because they are unwise in their witness." Or "Blessed are the difficult people who stir up trouble." Many Christians are persecuted, but often for the wrong reasons.

For instance, Joseph Bayly's tells a satirical story called, *The Gospel Blimp*. Some believers in a small town were eager to share their faith. They came up with idea of a gospel blimp. The blimp was piloted over the town, dragging Scripture banners and dropping tracts into backyards. They called these "gospel bombs". The people of the town put up with the intrusion for a while but their tolerance soon vanished and turned into hostility. This happened when the owner of the blimp installed a loud speaker and began insulting people with gospel broadcasts. The locals had enough. The blimp was sabotaged, and of course the Christians saw it as persecution.

Christians are often mistreated not for their Christianity, but because of their lack of it. Christians can be rejected because they are hypocritical, insensitive or thoughtless in their witness. Jesus is talking about persecution of an altogether different nature.

### b) What it is...

To understand what Jesus means we have to read his words in their entirety. Notices Jesus says in verse 10, "**Blessed are the those who are persecuted because of righteousness...**" and in verse 11, "**You are blessed when they insult you and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of me.**" It is the disciple's righteous living and their allegiance to Jesus that the world hates. Firstly, what is this righteous living?

The righteousness Jesus is talking about is that which he has already laid out in the Beatitudes. Why does the world hate this? Because the kingdom of heaven is not of this world. The world values the rich in spirit, the proud and self-assertive. Jesus values poverty of spirit. The world loves the happy go luck folks; those who make fun of sin not mourn over it. The world loves the strong and brash, not the gentle and meek. The world loves the material things only, the disciple longs for Christ and his righteousness. The world holds grudges and is callous, the disciple shows mercy to all. The world loves war, strife, and gossip. The disciple makes

peace. It's no wonder Christians are persecuted! The gulf between the values of the kingdom and the world is irreconcilable.

But the foundational reason why a disciple faces persecution is in verse 11, "on account of me," or "for my sake," Jesus says. It is our allegiance to King Jesus that will inevitably lead to persecution in this world. Listen to Jesus testimony in John 15:18-19:

**"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."**

The world hated Jesus and therefore it will hate you. It's as simple as that. The Apostle Paul writing to Timothy, puts it like this, "In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12).

### **c) What about you?**

If we are Christians we must ask ourselves a searching question, "Have I ever been persecuted because of my allegiance to Jesus?" or, "Am I being persecuted because of my allegiance to Jesus?" Now I'm sure not many of us in Australia have been physically tortured for Christ. But notice in verse 11, Jesus doesn't limit persecution to physical torture. It is extended to insults, lies made up about you, slander etc.

Have you ever been verbally abused for following Jesus? Have you ever been bullied for being a Christian? Have you been excluded from groups and conversations because of your faith? If yes, rejoice! If not, why not? You might have to ask yourself the hard question, am I really a Christian? The Beatitudes give us a searching test, are we really born again? Have I been born into the kingdom of heaven? If the answer is yes, you will face persecution.

100 years after Jesus preached his Sermon on the Mount, a man approached the great church father Tertullian. This man had a problem—his business interests and Christianity conflicted. He ended by asking, "What can I do? I must live!" Tertullian replied, "Must you?" When it came to loyalty to Christ and living, Tertullian held that the real Christian chooses Christ.

And friends, that is a glorious thing! It's a cause for great celebration. Which takes us to the second point, The Kick of Persecution.

## 2. The Kick of Persecution

By 'Kick' I mean pleasure, as in 'I get a kick out of this.' I don't mean to be flippant, but I only mean it to be memorable for you. Far from persecution causing you to become bitter or cynical, Jesus says it's cause for rejoicing. Check out verse 12, "**Be glad and rejoice, because your reward in heaven is great. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**" There is certainly a supernatural joy that comes from being persecuted. How else can you explain it? In Acts, the disciples are flogged and threatened by the Sanhedrin (the Jewish court), and they go out rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer on behalf of the Name (Acts 5:41). There are countless other examples throughout the Bible and history. Samuel Rutherford, the Scottish pastor wrote, "I never knew by nine years of preaching so much of Christ's love, as he taught me in Aberdeen by six months imprisonment." He also said, "Christ's cross, is such a burden as sails are to a ship or wings to a bird." The Lord reveals himself in a special way to those who suffer for his sake. But that doesn't mean it's without reason.

In verse 12 Jesus gives the reasons. The first reason to rejoice is the great reward in heaven. When J.D Rockefeller died, the public wanted to know the size of the fortune he left behind. A reporter secured an interview with one of Rockefeller's highest aides. He asked the aide how much Rockefeller left behind. The aide answered, "He left it all." Not so for those who have been persecuted for righteousness sake! Jesus literally says the reward is immeasurably great. They might lose it all in the world's eyes, but in Jesus eyes they gain it all. The Apostle Paul got this when he wrote, "For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory." (2 Cor. 4:17).

The second reason is there at the end of Matthew 5:12, when Jesus says "... **that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**" You should rejoice if you are persecuted because you are numbered with the greats. With the likes of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Elijah. These and many more are the great cloud of witnesses looking down on us, cheering us on towards the finish line (Hebrews 11). We might lose everything on earth, but we gain everything in heaven. And not as a reward for merit, but as John Calvin said, 'the promise of the reward is free.' This leads us to conclude on with one final and all important point.

### 3. The King of Persecution

If you face persecution for following Jesus it's a sign that you already belong to the kingdom. That's why Jesus says those who are persecuted because of righteousness are blessed (v. 10): **"theirs is the kingdom of heaven."** Not that they will gain entrance into the kingdom by their suffering, but they're already in the kingdom and their persecution for Jesus sake testifies to this fact.

This takes us to one of the most crucial doctrines of Christianity: you are something before you do something. The Christian life is becoming who you already are. You are not saved by your grief but by God's grace. We can't earn our way into the kingdom by being persecuted. That's not what Jesus is saying. In the Beatitudes he is teaching the character of a Christian. All his followers will manifest all eight Beatitudes. Why? Because the Beatitudes are snap shots of Jesus character, and a disciple is like their Lord. A Christian is in union with Christ.

We inherit the kingdom by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. We inherit the kingdom through the cross. We are saved because of Jesus persecution, not because of our own. He is the Righteous One who suffered for us. It's only when you worship and follow a crucified Messiah that you will be able to bear the cross. You can only let go of your personal reputation when you see that Jesus let go of his for you. You can only die to self when you see how much the Son of God loved you and gave himself for you.

Mary had a little lamb its fleece was white as snow. And everywhere that Mary went the Lamb was sure to go. You might know the next verse about the lamb following Mary to school. But not many people know the final verse, which tells us why the lamb followed Mary everywhere:

"What makes the lamb love Mary so?"  
the eager children cry.  
"Oh! Mary loves the lamb you know!"  
The teacher did reply.

And isn't that true of a Christian? What makes a Christian willing to follow Jesus anywhere? His love for you of course. His cross. That's what allows you to say in your suffering, "Christ's cross is such a burden as sails are to a ship, and wings to a bird."

### Prayer

Lord, help us to fix our eyes on you, the Author and Finisher of our faith. You endured the cross with joy because you delighted to save us. Help us to endure our cross with joy knowing you have saved us. And may we count it a real honour to suffer for the sake of your name. Amen.



## Closing Song: Take My Life and Let It Be

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0FBvoRwNyB0>

## Benediction

The God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, strengthen, and support you after you have suffered a little while. To Him be dominion, forever. Amen. (1 Peter 5:10-11)

## Virtual Morning Tea

Is there someone from our congregation that you haven't spoken to for a while? Why not give them a call now and see how they are going and if they have any needs the church could help fill.

## Prayer Points

1. Pray for the country of Syria (Pop 18m, Christians 745,000) Even though Christians have been in Syria since the first century, they comprise only 4% of the population. Since the war broke out in 2011, Islamic extremist groups have operated more openly. These groups, including Islamic State, seek to remove Christianity from Syria. Pray for peace and provision for Christian in times of extreme conflict. Pray that persecutors will experience the love of God and have their hearts changed. Pray for Syrians in refugee camps that they might be able to find a place to call home. Pray especially they will be protected from the COVID-19 virus
2. Pray for Appleby's (Indochina). They have sent the following prayer points. Give thanks with us for the way God has provided for our people - be that in terms of flights, or very specific provisions, or a settled heart to cope with the circumstances. And in some cases all of the above!

1 However we have one family in a very tricky situation. They basically got stopped in transit due to a booking irregularity. Now they are stuck in a country they don't know, in a city under lockdown with no prospects (at present) for getting out. In God's kindness. local brethren are hosting them, and they are daily seeing His hand pro-

viding awesomely. In the midst of chaos they have been able to laugh and worship together. But it is a super stressful situation. You don't need to know their names, but please lift this precious family to the Throne!

2 For workers who have returned to their home country: All from our area in this category were either planning a home assignment mid-year or finishing service. Most had only a couple of days to decide, pack and fly. Now they find themselves in various stages of lockdown where churches, groups etc aren't meeting.

3 For those staying on the field: Borders have now closed, flights are nearly non-existent. The decision to stay now feels very real. Give thanks for the rested confidence He has given. Ask for physical protection - while our crew are basically young and healthy and thus at low risk, the reality is that medical resources here are very limited and normal evacuation possibilities (for any medical problem or accident) are no longer possible. But above all ask for opportunities to love our neighbours well. This unprecedented crisis is opening hearts in unprecedented ways..

5. Pray for our health care workers (especial Liz and Jen) and our educators (especially Mark and Simon).

6. Please pray for our brothers and sisters in Vanuatu in the aftermath of Cyclone Harold.