

# Insults

## Matthew 5.10-11

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

Over recent years there's been loads of discussion about refereeing. On any weekend in the Premiership there are controversial decisions in games. So the solution is to introduce video refereeing called VAR. Imagine what it'd be like to be a referee – you'd have to learn to deal with abuse and criticism... same with anyone in public- like managers, musicians, artists and so on. Social media is good in some ways but it's meant people have become more harsh, more abusive and feel free to say whatever they want without thinking about it.

So how well do you respond to criticism? What about when it's totally unfair and unjustified? What about if you've even been attacked? How far would you go in your faith?

Every year 1000s of Christians are killed or die for their faith. Many hundreds of thousands of others are persecuted.

Yet other people are prepared to suffer for relatively pointless things! For example, apparently in the 1960s when the then USSR (Russia) banned The Beatles, people used to break their own limbs to smuggle in Beatles stuff! Weird or what!

1. Do you know of anyone who has had abuse or grief because of their faith? It may be you at school or college...

Doing some detached work the other week in an estate we had a couple of lads in their 20s getting threatening but we walked away. Other times I have had lads surround me in a school and other stuff. Generally though I've been OK.

2. Jesus seems to promise that as Christians we will get hassles. How does that make you feel? Why? How can you deal with the way you feel?

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3. Let's take a wee peek at 2 Corinthians 11.16-28 where Paul tells us about his sufferings. Read it through out loud. We'll see specific ways that Paul suffered.

Let's see what Paul went through... make a list:

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So we find that outside of Jesus, the greatest missionary faced a fair few problems. Not that we'll all face all or any of these. But you may and we need to be prepared.

4. So how do we get prepared?

When I read what happened to Paul – and more recently to the Chinese apostle, Brother Yun (read his book called 'The Heavenly Man'), I wonder how these guys went through all of this? What do you think?

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You know what, there's 2 things we can learn. First, God toughens us up to prepare us. Second, God gives us the grace and strength to deal with whatever we're going through. How would you cope if you came home from a wicked day out and found that your brother had been killed in a car crash while on his way to a holiday after serving God for a year? You know what? I dealt with that. How? Why? Because of God's grace, his Holy Spirit and the prayers of God's people. So get praying for your brothers and sisters who are doing the business for God... and for yourself.

5. So how do we deal with personal, biting, criticism? Let me warn you now – expect this from within the church as much as from outside the church. It's understandable if the world disrespects Christians, but your own Christian crew? Just be warned and bite your tongue. You reap what you sow.

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(More - in our Events section, we've got a session on criticism).

## 6. YOUR RESPONSE

How can we respond? How can we prepare? Well, let's learn from the Bible. Remember that many of the apostles and many Christians have their own struggles. We all do. Let's pray for each other. You know what? Many of the Christians in the persecuted church pray for Christians in the West to experience more persecution. Why? Because it often spreads the message of Jesus into new places and the Kingdom of God grow – it's happened a lot, like in China right now.

How can we respond? We have to get it straight that (a) this world is not our home and there is something way better for us with Jesus in heaven; and (b) we must put the Kingdom of God first in all things. This means that our things become secondary and this is what our priorities should be.

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