

¹¹ Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. ¹² Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great *is* your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

¹³ “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.

¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all *who are* in the house. ¹⁶ Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

Introduction

We continue our series in Matthew’s Gospel and today we are moving from a general statement by Jesus on the persecution of believers to a more specific one aimed at the disciples.

In v. 11-16 Jesus is addressing the disciples personally.

In v. 11-12 Jesus is repeating something he said in v. 10, and therefore the first part of my message is similar to last month, but perhaps a little more personal as Jesus directs His teaching to what the disciples are going to face in the future.

I am going to start by asking you a question.

The question was asked by a Jewish believer in my last Church in England.

The lady said “**Why have the Jewish people been the most persecuted nation in the history of the world?**”

She highlighted the millions of Jews who were killed in the second world war, and then gave me an outline of the persecution of the Jewish people from the book of Acts through to modern day.

The only answer that I could give this Jewish lady was from the Bible.

Deut. 7: v. 6-8.

⁶ “For you *are* a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. ⁷ The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; ⁸ but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Isaiah 43: v. 10.

“You *are* My witnesses,” says the LORD,
“And My servant whom I have chosen,
That you may know and believe Me,
And understand that I *am* He.
Before Me there was no God formed,
Nor shall there be after Me.

Today Israel is a witness to the world in three ways;

1. The Jewish Nation is a witness to the **existence of God Himself.**
2. The Jewish nation is witness to the **truth of the Bible.**
3. The Jewish nation is a witness that one day **Jesus Christ will return to this earth.**

I said that this has come at great cost to the Jewish people, but one day when we see Jesus, the cost will be worth the sacrifice.

I am not sure that the lady was fully convinced, but one day she will be!!!

So apart from the Jewish Nation, who are the most persecuted people in the world today?

The simple answer is people who witness for Jesus Christ.

Acts 1: v. 8

⁸ But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Jesus commissioned the early disciples to be a witness of Himself, and He promised them power through the Holy Spirit to enable them to be good witnesses.

2 Timothy 3: v. 12.

¹² Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

Before we go into the text I would like to quote four people on the subject of persecution.

Benjamin Fernando said, “Persecution is one of the surest signs of the genuineness of our Christianity.”

Jack Dain said, “It is the suffering Church that is the growing Church.”

James Milner said, “Persecution often does in this life what the last great day will do completely, separate the wheat from the tares.”

John MacArthur said, “As we manifest the standards of Christ, so we will share the reproach of Christ. Persecution is one of the most tangible evidences of Salvation.”

As we now enter into the text we need to realise that this teaching of Jesus is the one teaching so far that seems **most contrary to human thinking**.

Basically Jesus is saying that if you obey the teaching of Matthew Chapter 5: v. 3-10, then you are going to be persecuted.

This seems rather strange to us. If we behave in a godly way, surely people will respect us and not persecute us?

However, we must understand that God has a bigger picture in mind and that His wisdom is not the wisdom of this world.

1 Corinthians 1: v. 20.

Where *is* the wise? Where *is* the scribe? Where *is* the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?

The text in v. 11-12 teach us two simple things.

1. The foreknowledge of Jesus about future persecution – v. 11.

Jesus was talking about future events in the lives of His disciples.

He was warning them that to follow Him would involve persecution.

The persecution that Jesus mentions here is in the form of false accusations.

People are going to tell lies about you in order to get you into trouble.

This type of persecution was the persecution that Jesus experienced personally.

Jesus was verbally abused many times during his earthly ministry and especially prior to His crucifixion.

Jesus was accused of being a glutton and a drunkard in Matthew 11: v. 19.

When we are personally abused for our Christian faith and action, then that abuse is actually directed to Jesus Himself.

We are representatives of Jesus Christ, doing His work here and now.

Jesus knows all about it, He is here, supporting us and encouraging us.

2. There is a reward for everybody who is persecuted for the sake of Jesus – v. 12.

The reward is not given to us here on this earth, but it is a future reward that we will receive.

We are not sure about the specific rewards in Heaven, but for me Heaven is enough.

The fact that we will have a new eternal body, without sickness and decay and live in a place without sin and Satan, is in itself the best reward.

Thank you Jesus that you have provided a place in Heaven for all those who put their faith and trust in you and your work on the cross.
Thank you Jesus that you died in my place, that you took my sin upon your life.
Thank you Jesus that your grace is enough.

We now move on to v. 12-16 where Jesus makes a statement about the future life of the disciples.

In these verses Jesus is not telling his disciples to try and be salt and light in their community. He is saying that if they follow his teaching in Matthew Chapter 5: v. 3-10, **then they will be salt and light in their communities.**

It is important that we understand the **two illustrations** that Jesus gives to His disciples, so we will discuss them separately.

The point of these two illustrations is that the disciples might be an **effective influence** upon the people and places that they visit in the future.

This is also a challenge to all of us here today.

1. Disciples must be full flavoured salt – v. 13.

There is a small seaside town very near my home town in England. The name of that town is called “Budleigh Salterton”. The original name was “Budleigh Salt Town.”

The reason for its name is that many years ago when salt was a precious commodity, they were able to harvest salt at the mouth of the river Otter that flowed into the sea at the edge of this town.

Normally seaside towns are named after the river that flows into the sea, except this town, because the salt was more important than the river.

During the period in history when Jesus was speaking these words, salt was a most precious commodity.

The Romans used to say that except for the sun, nothing was more valuable.

Roman soldiers were often paid their wages in salt.

Even in England today, sometimes you hear people saying that somebody is the salt of the earth.

By this expression they mean that they are a wonderful person.

The disciples who heard the words of Jesus, fully understood his illustration about salt.

There are 5 things that we can draw out about “salt” that will challenge us to walk closely with Jesus.

Firstly, salt is white – This is a challenge to purity in our lives. If we want to be effective for Jesus, holiness and purity is essential.

Secondly, salt flavours food - As Christians, our lives should be a positive influence. In food terms we should taste nice. Our lives should be attractive and not sour people with bad behaviour.

Thirdly, salt stings - Salt stings when it is placed upon a wound. There is a sense where true Christian teaching and life-style, stings the world.

So often the Church is trying to please and attract the world that it fails to present the real gospel in case it offends people.

The gospel message and the gospel life style will always offend people.

Today the exclusiveness of Christianity and presenting Jesus as the only way to get to Heaven is very offensive.

Fourthly, salt creates thirst – In expensive bars and clubs in Europe, you get free salted peanuts. This sounds great, but the free salted peanuts are there for a reason. They are there to encourage you to drink more alcohol in order to satisfy your thirst. If we are walking with Jesus, people will either be attracted by our life-style and message or they will be repelled.

For some people our life-style will create a thirst for what we have, what we believe, and for the peace and assurance of Heaven to come in the future.

Fifthly and finally, salt acts as a preservative - We all know that in the ancient world there were no fridges or deep freezers. Perhaps there are people here today that remember when we had cool places to keep our food, and we didn't even have fridges.

In these situations, salt was used as a preservative. Especially in meat products, salt has the properties that slows down the decay of meat.

It keeps it fresh for a period of time.

There is no doubt about it that Christians preserve the world from total destruction. Until the rapture of all Christians, we can have a powerful influence on the world. Historians all agree that the 18th century “Revival” in England saved it from a revolution. The history books accurately recorded don’t lie. We will be the salt of the earth if we follow Jesus and His teachings.

2. Disciples must be powerful lights to the world.

There is a difference between salt and light. The difference is that salt is hidden, light is obvious.

Salt works secretly while light works openly.

Salt works within while light works on the outside.

Both salt and light are important but have different functions.

Salt is the more indirect influence of the gospel, light is more of the direct communication of the gospel.

Salt works through our living and light works through our preaching and teaching.

Salt can delay the process of corruption, but it can’t change corruption.

However, light is very positive, it reveals what is wrong and false but helps to produce what is right and truthful.

It is clear to me, as it was to Jesus, that you can’t have one without the other.

We must be both salt and light.

If we are just the salt of the earth we will live positive Christian lives, however we are not going to change the lives of other people.

The light that we have as believers is both God and God’s word, the Bible.

David said in Psalm 36: v. 9 “**For with you is the fountain of life; in your LIGHT, we see light.**”

By nature, light must be visible in order to illuminate.

Therefore, we can’t hide God’s word, we must bring it out into the open, preach it, teach it, defend it, love it, and protect it.

3. Disciples must stay fresh both in their lives and in their witness to others.

Some salt in Israel, like the salt found on the shores of the dead sea is contaminated with gypsum and other minerals that make its taste flat and repulsive.

It looks like salt but it doesn’t taste like salt.

If some of this salt found its way into the houses of the people, it was not used. The people threw it on to the mud roads where people trod on it.

So the lesson here is that salt doesn’t become un-salty, but it can be contaminated.

Jesus here is talking about losing our effectiveness as His disciples.

Sin and focusing on worldly things can contaminate our lives.

James 4: v. 3-4. (N.K.J.)

³You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend *it* on your pleasures. ⁴Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Finally, for light to be effective it must have a power source.

You can go to an electrical store in Japan and buy a large light for your ceiling or a small light for your bed-side.

However, unless these lights are connected to the mains electricity or a battery, they are not going to be able to give light.

In the same way, as Christians, we need the Holy Spirit of God, to enable us to shine the light of God’s word and to let His light reveal to others, the power behind our life-style.

What we really need is the power of God’s Holy Spirit to live a life like Jesus, so that we will be effective witnesses for him, like salt and light.

May we cry to God every day to be filled with His Holy Spirit.