

MATTHEW 5:10
WHEN TWO WORLDS COLLIDE...

What happens when two worlds collide? "Caesar is Lord" said the first-century Roman world; "Jesus is Lord" said the gospel and the first-century Church; two ultimate loyalties when there can be only the one ultimate loyalty. What happens when these two worlds collide? Twenty-first century Britain: the secular, atheist agenda for our society says there is no place for God in public life, and that our values should be shaped with no reference to God or religion; the Christian gospel says that Christian faith and the lordship of Jesus affects every aspect of life and society; two different views of the world, two different sets of values - what happens when these two worlds collide? Two military and political alliances were building in 1914: Germany, Austria, Hungary on the one hand; Britain and France on the other; what happens when these two worlds collide? In this case, we know the answer – it was conflict for four years in "the war to end all wars" except that it didn't and it happened all over again in 1939, two worlds collided again, and it has happened again in Iraq and in Afghanistan and there are two Muslim worlds which are colliding in Northern Iraq and Syria. What happens when two worlds collide?

"Caesar is Lord" said the first-century Roman world; loyalty to the empire and the emperor is demanded of Rome's citizens and especially of its soldiers, forced to swear allegiance on oath to Caesar as Lord, Caesar who at times is a figure even given god-like status. But for the Christian, Jesus is Lord and so the Christians refused to take that oath to Caesar. Their supreme loyalty was to Jesus and nothing would persuade them to do anything other than confess that Jesus is Lord. "The only crime of the Christian was that he set Christ above Caesar and for that supreme loyalty the Christians died in their thousands... for the sake of the lonely supremacy of Jesus." (Wm Barclay) When these two worlds collided, the strong world of the Roman Empire took out its wrath on the Christians and they were at least thrown into prison, some were tortured, some even became martyrs for their faith. They had done nothing wrong, but for loyalty to Jesus they suffered,

"Blessed are..." (Matthew 5:10) Today we come to the last of the Beatitudes, this set of eight sayings that are about the values of the disciple of Jesus. Jesus teaches these values as a way to live, values to aspire after. These are eight sayings of the one group of people, those who follow Jesus; this is Jesus' counter-culture because He teaches a very different set of values from those of the world; we are to aspire to be meek, poor in spirit, pure, peacemakers, aspirations so often at odds with the values of the world we see around us where power, strength, wealth, influence and celebrity are what we value. To all of these qualities, Jesus adds a blessing from God – the whole blessing of God rests on the people who look to live by these values; so often it seems that the disciples of Jesus have nothing, yet Jesus promises that we who seem to have nothing, we shall possess everything!

"Blessed are..." (Matthew 5:10) It seems at first sight that this beatitude is different from the rest. The others are all about values to aspire after; surely no-one aspires to be persecuted! This is something that happens to us rather than a value to which we might aspire. Well, yes and no! No-one aspires to be persecuted, to suffer at the hands of others for something that we believe. Yet, Jesus talks about the person who does suffer in this way as greatly blessed by God. But here's the question: how much does faith mean to you? That's the value behind this beatitude. How far are we prepared to go for loyalty to Jesus? How much does that loyalty mean to you? Is faith so valuable to us that we are prepared to be persecuted for that faith rather than give it up? To those who stand firm in their faith Jesus promises us to be heirs of God's

kingdom and that one day we will share in His glory, to be a people greatly blessed by God even if in this world we are a poor and persecuted minority.

Two worlds collide. Jesus promised that it would be like this. In the words we read from John chapter 15, Jesus talks to His disciples about these two worlds. Jesus is about to die and at one level His death is the result of the machinations of those who have grown to hate Him; some are jealous of Him, others don't like His teaching, and still others see Him as troublesome and so they plot to get rid of Him and on the day after He spoke these words, He is crucified and His enemies stand at the foot of the cross and laugh at Him. The last laugh is with Jesus because on the third day he is raised from the dead. On that evening before He died, He warns His friends: "*If the...*" (*John 15:18f*) Jesus suffered for His loyalty to God; so the Christian will face the same for His loyalty to Jesus. Here are two very different views of the world, two irreconcilable value-systems - what happens when these two worlds collide? As ever, the answer is conflict and the friends of Jesus face that kind of hatred and conflict just as Jesus did.

Christian young people in school, bullied for being different! Friends who laugh at us for our Christian faith. The atheist world venting its anger and ridicule at Christian values in the letter pages of the newspapers, or in places where political decisions are made. Christians in Northern Iraq in hiding for fear of radical Muslims who will simply kill them for no other reason than their Christian faith. Christians in other places meeting in secret and in fear because they are afraid of people who will bomb their church buildings and meeting places. In all of these situations, we are faced with the question: how much does my faith mean to me? The answer to that question will shape our reaction to these situations. If faith is something we like having but can take or leave and are not bothered, then we might give up our faith and the practice of that faith if it simply leads us into trouble. If, on other hand, faith means everything to us, is the well-spring of our life, and shapes everything about us, then nothing will move us; we will be prepared to go to any lengths rather than give it up, prepared even to be persecuted before we give up the faith than means the world to us and before we give up our loyalty to Jesus, that ultimate loyalty. Those who bear the cross, hope to wear the crown of glory!

Loyalty is a huge quality. Loyalties come in so many parts of our lives. For the Christian, the ultimate loyalty is to Jesus; He is Lord of every aspect of our lives. Sometimes we think that such loyalty to Jesus is at expense of other loyalties, to family, friends, work, the country; but in fact, loyalty to Jesus enhances these other loyalties, makes them stronger. Loyalty to Jesus should make us better people, with a deeper appreciation of other people and their needs; that should strengthen our relationships. But there are times when these worlds collide: what then do we do? Lots of Christians have gone before us and discovered that their faith is so important to them that nothing will make them give it up! Jesus is supreme and we are prepared to put up with anything rather than give Him up. We are not often persecuted for our faith; there are times when it's hard to be a Christian, times when that question is asked of us - how important is our faith? Is Jesus the supreme Lord of our lives? Today, we remember loyalty: loyalty to the fight; or more, loyalty to comrades in arms, to the cause, to King and country, a loyalty in which people gave their lives rather than run away. We admire loyalty when we see it; Jesus admires loyalty when He sees it in us. How much does faith mean to you? "*Blessed are...*" (*Matthew 5:10*)