**HOLY SAVIOUR, BITTERNE BIBLE STUDY – WEEK BEGINNING JUNE 28th (Beatitudes 8)**

*We are coming towards the end of our Beatitudes studies. This week we look at the final Beatitude and next week we look back to gain an overview of what they have to say to us.* ***As usual you may find it helpful to jot down your thoughts about the questions in the spaces provided*** *–* ***and it would be really good to share them with others.*** *Phone, Skype, email some members of your homegroup or a friend and/or email me your thoughts (* brianparfitt@btinternet.com *).* ***Brian Parfitt***

Have you ever suffered some form of persecution because you are a Christian – if only being made fun of or people at work making life difficult for you? What examples of persecution are you aware of from around the world?

**This week we are thinking of the final Beatitude, with the additional explanation Jesus adds, which speaks of being blessed when you are persecuted. God’s people have always faced opposition. It was true in Old Testament days – they persecuted the prophets, Jesus says. It was true for the early church, during which time it was said that ‘the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church’ because the witness of those who died made a positive impact on those who witnessed it. Persecution is still happening - it’s been calculated that there were more martyrs in the 20th century than in all the previous ones added together. Around the world while many Christians may not die for their faith they will face opposition, even in our own country.**

**To explore what this Beatitude means we are going to look at some passages from the Bible. *(If it’s helpful you might look at them over a few days, one at a time, rather than all at once.)***

**Read Matthew 5.10-12.** What does Jesus say about why people will oppose his followers? Can you think of people in the Old Testament who suffered because of their faith in God? How does Jesus encourage us to face opposition?

There are numerous passages where Jesus warns his disciples about the cost of following him. **Read Matthew 10.16-39** which is one of them. **Look at verses 16-25**.

 - What do they tell us about the reasons Jesus’ followers will be persecuted?

- What will be the sources of that persecution? Can you think of examples of persecution from those sources- have you faced opposition in your family, at work, or elsewhere?

 - What promises does Jesus make which will sustain or encourage his followers?

**Look at verses 26-39.** What do these verses add to your responses to the questions above?

By the time Peter wrote his first letter persecution was a reality for Christians. There are several places where he speaks about it (e.g.1 Peter 2.11-12; 2.18-25; 3.8-18; 4.4 and 4.12-19). R**ead 1 Peter 3.13-18.** What sort of lives should we be leading as people called to witness for Christ? How do we respond to the non-Christians around us?

How can the fact that Jesus suffered encourage us?

**Look back** at what you have learnt from ***each of the passages*** we have looked at. What have you discovered about facing persecution and opposition? How will this encourage you in your living for Christ? How can we support Christians facing opposition here or more outright persecution abroad?