

Beatitudes - Persecuted

Theme: God blesses you when you are treated badly for doing right.
The Kingdom of Heaven is yours. (Matthew 5v10)

Game: Head It / Catch It: Stand the group in a circle with one player in the centre. The one in the middle throws a ball to each player in turn with the command to either 'Head it' or 'Catch it'. The player has to do the opposite to what is said. If they get it wrong they must kneel on one knee until their next turn.

Game: Sticky toffee: The child who is "on" has to tag as many children as possible. The others run away but once caught, they must stand still with arms outstretched until a child who has not been tagged goes under their arm and says, "You're free!"

Introduction: Play Good News/Bad News: Label one side of the room 'Good News' and the other 'Bad News'. Children have to decide whether different scenarios are Good News or Bad News and run to the appropriate side. (Suggestions in Resources)
Discuss why they made their choices. Say that today we are going to look at something in the Bible that at first looked like bad news, but was it bad news in the end?

Memory verse: "We know that everything works together for good for those who love God."
Romans 8 v 28 Show the sheet from resources with the words reversed. Give each child a piece of paper and pen (can use the blank one in Resources) and ask them to write the words backwards to find what the verse is.

Story: Acts 7:54 – 8:8 The stoning of Stephen and the spread of the early church.
Tell from the Bible or read the story from Resources.

Application: Ask the children if they can recall what the 'bad news' things were in the story (*Stephen's death; Christians being thrown in jail by Saul*). Refer back to the memory verse. We had to look at it in a different way to make sense of it. Ask them if there was any 'good news' in the story. If they don't suggest it, highlight that the believers went to all sorts of different places that they would not have gone to if they had not been persecuted (*may need to explain what persecution is*). As a result of this, many more people got to hear about Jesus. This is still happening today in lots of countries throughout the world, where Christians are being persecuted for their beliefs. But as a result, the church keeps growing. It may be appropriate to share an example from your own experience about something that at first seemed like bad news, but God has used it to help you or others.

Song: 'Father God You're By My Side' – Ishmael **The Kids Colossal Jumbo Box Set CD1:14**

Prayer: Look on the internet for a map and/or list that shows countries where Christians are persecuted. If it can be printed, place it in the middle of the children sitting in a circle. Place it in the middle and ask them to pray quietly for one of the countries. Finish by thanking God that He can bring good out of bad things that happen.

Resources: Funsheet ; story; good news/bad news scenarios; memory verse blank

Story

Stephen, one of Jesus' followers, was arrested for speaking about Jesus. He was taken to the religious leaders, who were really angry with what he was doing. Stephen said that he was looking into heaven and could see Jesus. The leaders covered their ears with their hands. Then they all rushed at him at once, dragged him out of the city, and threw large stones at him to kill him. A man called Saul was in charge. Before he died, Stephen called out to God to forgive them.

After that the Christians living in Jerusalem began to be treated really badly. Saul tried to destroy the church; going from house to house, he dragged out the believers, both men and women, and threw them into jail. All the believers were scattered throughout the surrounding towns and cities.

But wherever they went, they kept telling people all about Jesus and many of them became followers of Jesus. Jesus' friend Philip went to the capital city of Samaria and told them about Jesus and performed miracles, healing people like Jesus had done. The people wanted to become Christians and the church grew and grew.

Good News / Bad News

- 1 A local shop has donated free chocolate to the school
- 2 The chocolate has all gone to the staff room
- 3 There are no lessons this Friday
- 4 The lessons will now be on Saturday
- 5 It is going to rain tomorrow
- 6 Everton (*or local team of your choice*) have won the cup
- 7 You have been accused of telling people about Jesus
- 8 Saul is going from town to town treating the Christians badly

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