

September 13, 2015
Sunday Morning Service
Series: John
Community Baptist Church
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from John 15:18-16:4.

1. What kind of persecution from the world do you experience because you love and follow Christ?
2. How does the Holy Spirit sustain you in the face of persecution?
3. Why do the leaders of the United States pursue a course of action and laws that make life difficult for followers of Christ (i.e. abortion, homosexual marriage, restriction on displays of Christian commitment, etc.)?
4. Is it right for Christians to live as much like their world as possible in order to avoid persecution?

THE WORLD'S GREAT HATRED **John 15:18-16:4**

Recently I had the experience of riding some roller coasters and am glad to report that I am still able to enjoy the ride. However, there was one ride in particular that I think I will stay away from hereafter. Near the beginning of this particular ride, the car was pulled straight up (I mean 90° straight up) for ninety feet. When we crested the top, the track dropped a few feet and then made a sharp right hand turn. That was pretty cool. As the ride proceeded, we entered a pitch dark tunnel. Again we were clicking away straight up where we could see

light ninety feet above. However, this time when the car crested the top, it plunged ninety feet straight down into the dark.

Okay, I'm too old for that one. But probably that is a good illustration of how the disciples felt as Jesus was unburdening His heart to them with last-minute instructions. In the previous section of John's letter (15:12-17), we read again about Jesus' amazing, incomprehensibly deep love for us whom He has chosen. But suddenly, as we continue to hear from the words of Jesus that John recorded, things changed abruptly. Just as the disciples were reveling in Jesus' great love for them, Jesus flipped the coin over and showed them that while He loves them, the people of their world hate them . . . a lot!

Jesus used the term *world* in a fairly broad sense here. It refers to everyone who was not part of Christ's chosen people. That would obviously include the unregenerated Gentiles, especially the Roman government, as well as the unregenerated Jewish religious rulers. That being true, the disciples should not have been surprised when the Jewish rulers of the Sanhedrin ordered them to stop preaching about Jesus and beat them and imprisoned them in an effort to silence the message about the true Messiah. A few years later, the Roman government jumped on the bandwagon of persecuting Christ's followers and took persecution to the extreme for a couple hundred years.

Things have not changed much since then. According to all the major human rights watch dog groups, persecution against Christians across the world is at an all-time high. That means it is worse than the Roman persecutions of the first two centuries, worse than the Spanish Inquisition of the fifteenth century, worse than martyrdoms of the Reformation in the sixteenth century, and worse than Communist persecutions of the twentieth century. More applicable to us is the reason Kim Davis went to prison. It was not because she is a bad person, a non-conformist, or even a law breaker who refused to issue marriage licenses to people of the same gender. The reason she was imprisoned is because the world hates Christ's followers and she represents Christ's followers. In light of this persecution, the best advice to us Christians, in the common vernacular is, "Get used to it."

The most astonishing thing about the history of persecution against Christ's followers is the victims' common response. When the

first apostles were arrested and beaten for preaching Jesus, *They left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name [of Christ] (Acts 5:41)*. Likewise, even the last words of many martyrs for Christ have been positive testimonies that revealed great confidence in Christ's love and care.

There is no doubt that the people who live under the power and influence of Satan will not love, or often not appreciate, the followers of Christ. We should not expect any other response. However, when Satan motivates his people to attack, malign, slander or even kill us, we should determine that we will focus on Christ's love for us. This is divine balance. It is a principle found throughout Scripture. Life will not be lived on the high plain of Christ's love all day, every day. That is unrealistic. But when the tough times come and the world proves Jesus' warning to be true, we can remember that He loves us so much that He already died for us. There is no greater love than that. We can remember to love our brothers who are in such trials. There is no better response to great hatred than to remember Christ's great love for us and to express and experience our love for each other.

Christians Don't Fit (vv.18-20).

Jesus taught the disciples something that most people would consider to be quite negative. He told them and us that the world hates outsiders (vv.18-19). They hate people who they consider to be different just like they hated Jesus. The fact has been established that the world hated Christ. Jesus warned, *If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you (v.18)*. His words should cause you to wonder if there is a possibility that the world will hate you. The word *if* seems to indicate that maybe the world will hate Christ's followers and maybe not.

It is true that all unsaved people do not show hatred to all saved people all the time. However, the text makes it clear that this is a general principle of life. Throughout the Bible, we learn that the world (as a system of thought and activity) in principle hates God! To some extent, and on various occasions, almost all Christians are the object of hatred from the unsaved.

There is a reason for this principle. We must realize that the same people who hate the followers of Christ also hate Christ. That

is what Jesus taught in these words. Jesus Christ was the supreme object of hatred from unregenerated people. But having stated that, we can imagine someone disagreeing and saying, "No, not everyone hated Christ." Were there not masses of people who followed Him? Yes, the masses followed Him in order to receive medical attention, in order to receive food, in order to see miracles, or maybe just to get ammunition to use against the Pharisees. But, who was with Jesus in the end except for eleven fearful disciples and a handful of faithful women? Almost the whole world had rejected God the Son.

Therefore, if we show dedication to the most hated person in human history, why would we think we would receive different responses? Jesus plainly warned us that the world hates you because you are different. He said, *If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you (v.19)*. One thing that is certain is that if you are among Christ's chosen, you are not part of the world.

Oh, this rejection appears to be a sociological issue then? It is true that if the disciples were identified as followers of Christ, they would be marginalized. So it is with us. When Christ chooses us, He sets us aside from the entire rest of the world, who are not chosen, and, therefore, destined for hell. We relish the fact that Christ chose us to be His people and to be cleansed from sin by His sacrifice.

We are happy to be set apart from a world that hates God, right? Actually, we must submit to the reality that if we are not part of the world, it will be obvious. Being set apart is one thing, but sticking out is something else. The world (again as principle and as a whole) does not love people who are not like them. It is a common human trait for people to fear aliens, and we don't mean Martians. Human nature is typically suspicious of anyone who looks different, speaks different, or acts different.

That attitude is going to impact us followers of Christ. Because God chooses us to be in Christ, we are marked and obvious. When Christ made us distinct, He clothed us in His righteousness. His righteousness is obviously conflicted with the world's unrighteousness. As a result, our works, our speech, our very lives will be marked by righteousness and, therefore, we will be very obvious. We will stick out. True believers living in an unrighteous

world will be marked as obviously as the 144,000 witnesses who God seals in the Tribulation (Rev. 7). We will be like Cain who God marked for preservation (Gen. 4:15). We will stick out much like Daniel, Azariah, Hananiah, Mishael who stood out as distinct from their pagan peers.

Standing out as a follower of Christ is better than fitting in with a world that hates Him. If you fit well with the people who reject Jesus Christ and God's Word, there is a problem. We must do what we can to influence these people, speak and demonstrate the truth of the Bible to them, and show them the righteousness of Christ. But if we seek to temper righteousness in order to be accepted by people who hate righteousness, we reveal a serious spiritual problem.

Because we stand out from the rest of the world, we will be targets of persecution. That is because people respond to the Master's servants as they respond to the Master. Jesus gave the disciples a common sense principle when He said, *Remember the word that I said to you: "A servant is not greater than his master" (v.20a)*. This is the same principle Jesus taught in the context of washing the disciples' feet. At that time He said, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him" (John 13:16)*. The lesson at that point was that the disciples should humble themselves as He did and serve each other. Voluntary humiliation is a tough lesson to teach our human pride. But how much tougher it is to realize that because the world hated and persecuted Jesus, they will do the same to us who are His servants?

Servants of the Master who take on the traits of the Master can also expect a common sense response from people who don't like the Master. Jesus warned, *If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours (v.20b)*. Did the world persecute Jesus? Yes. Then the same kind of people will persecute us. The amazing thing is that much of the persecution launched at Jesus came from the most religious people in Israel. They were not people who kept Jesus' words. Some did, and they didn't persecute Jesus. Those were people like the eleven disciples who believed Jesus and followed Him in order to become like Him. They were the ones who Jesus chose to set apart out of the world. Jesus taught that it will be the same for us. There will be people who

respond to the truth when we share it. But sadly, most do not. We wish that everyone was like us who responded to the truth of the Bible. But then, we who respond to the truth of the Bible don't fit with those who reject it.

Christ Doesn't Fit (vv.21-25).

Sinners hate God the Father, God the Son, and God's people (vv.21-24). Jesus said, *(21) But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. (22) If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. (23) Whoever hates me hates my Father also. (24) If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father.*

Jesus established some clear and important truths during His ministry. First, He revealed that He, God the Son, is equal with God the Father. God the Son proved equality with God the Father by teaching the Father's truth. He often taught that He simply conveyed the truth He received from the Father. People often acknowledged that His teaching was superior, even God-like. Furthermore, God the Son proved His equality with God the Father by doing the Father's works. He taught that He simply did the works of the Father who sent Him. When people observed Jesus' miracles, they saw the work of God. Jesus taught that such works were intended to verify His claim to equality with God the Father.

Because God the Son taught truth and validated His teaching with miracles, sinners are without excuse (vv.22,24). He told us that the truth He established reveals sinners' sin. He said, *If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin (v.22)*. That does not mean that the people were innocent of sin before Jesus came. Rather, Jesus' teaching and miracles proved that He was Divine. The peoples' rejection of Him as God, the divine, proved that they were sinners.

The miracles actually revealed the sinners' stubborn rebellion. *If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father (v.24)*. The sin, for which people are specifically

guilty, is the root issue of rejecting God the Son by rejecting God the Father. If they had really trusted God, they would have received Jesus. But they didn't believe and they didn't receive God's Son. They were deceived and deceiving in their religion. Sinners still are. Often they are still religious and always they are still deceived and deceiving.

Is that so bad? After all, it is true of almost everyone. It is quite bad because the sinners' resistance to God's truth is proof of their hatred (vv.23, 24b). To reject God the Son is to reject God the Father. Jesus warned, *Whoever hates me hates my Father also* (v.23). Rejection of Jesus is not just a matter of preference. Rejecting Jesus Christ as God the Son is a manifestation of hatred toward God. To reject Christ's authoritative teaching and confirming miracles is proof of hatred. Because the people in Jesus' day had observed His miracles it was true that *now they have seen and hated both me and my Father* (v.24b). They saw God the Father revealed in God the Son's teaching and miracles. Therefore, when they rejected Jesus, they rejected the God they claimed to love. They proved unequivocal rejection of Jesus by killing Him.

Will not the same kind of people do the same kind of stuff to people who live like Jesus? Jesus said that such is the case. He said that sinners do *these things* to Christians because of their ignorant hatred (v.21). *But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me* (v.21).

And so it has been since Jesus uttered these words of warning. Jews hated Christ because they did not know God. They were quite sure they were the keepers of the truth about God, the protectors of His law. But because they are ignorant of the true God, they persecuted Christ's followers.

Romans prided themselves in being very broad and open-minded which allowed for the worship of hundreds of different gods. Sadly they did not know the one true God. Therefore, they persecuted and murdered the followers of God the Son when they refused to embrace popular and politically correct religion.

Muslims respond the same way. In the seventh century, a new religion came to life which taught about a false god named Alla and a prophet named Mohammed. Because they do not know the true God, they persecute and murder the followers of God the Son and

God the Father. Their "bible" (Koran) requires this kind of response. Sura 9.30 states, *And the Jews say: Uzair is the son of Allah; and the Christians say: The Messiah is the son of Allah; these are the words of their mouths; they imitate the saying of those who disbelieved before; may Allah destroy them; how they are turned away!* So what is their response? Sura 2:161 *On unbelievers is the curse of Allah.* Sura 2:191 *Slay them wherever ye find them and drive them out of the places whence they drove you out, for persecution is worse than slaughter.* Sura 2:193 *Fight against them until idolatry is no more and Allah's religion reigns supreme.* They are ignorant of God, and as a result they persecute the followers of Christ.

Communists conclude along with their father Karl Marx that religion (ultimately love for Christ) is the opiate of the people. They reject God by convincing themselves that He does not exist. Therefore, hating God the Father and God the Son, they persecute and execute faithful followers.

American leaders have fallen into the same pit of sin. The president and Supreme Court justices have rejected the abundant truth about God scattered all over American history and American society. Their rejection of God proves their hatred of God. Therefore, they persecute God's followers by making laws that contradict the first Amendment to the Constitution of the United States which reads: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

Where there is hatred of God and His Bible, that right must be taken away from Americans who love and trust God. Therefore, the response of hatred against Christians is not sociological, in that we don't fit in society. Their response of hatred is actually theological. Their hatred is God centered.

Viewing all this with an eye on eternity, we realize that it is all part of the process of God's Word being fulfilled. Jesus taught that whatever God's Word said about Him the Christ will come to pass. *But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: "They hated me without a cause"* (v.25). Wasn't the hatred of the world against God the Son tragic? Yes, but. . . ! It was necessary because it

was God's plan. We must remember that nothing the world thinks or does can thwart the Father's plan for the Son. Likewise, whatever the Bible says about us will come to pass. Jesus' warning here comes in the context of teaching about our relationship with Him. To that end Paul promised, *Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived (2 Timothy 3:12-13).*

Does this mean that Christians who do what Jesus would do will be persecuted? "Oh no!" Apparently God's plan has gone awry! Nothing the world thinks or does can thwart God's plan for His children. How can we live in such circumstances?

The Helper Helps When We Don't Fit (15:26-16:4).

Jesus offered us great encouragement when He promised that through the Holy Spirit's help we will be His witnesses (vv.26-27). This has to be so because God the Holy Spirit has to bear witness about God the Son. Jesus promised, *"But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me" (v.26).* Again this was a promise that Jesus would send the Helper who is just like Himself. He came from God the Father just like Jesus, God the Son, came from God the Father. Because God the Son came from the Father, Jesus gave witness about the truth, righteousness, and character of God. Therefore also, the Holy Spirit who came from the Father must testify to the same truth. That truth is the truth about Jesus of Nazareth being God the Son.

Then it only stands to reason that because we are indwelt by God the Holy Spirit, we have to bear witness about God the Son. *And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning (v.27).* Jesus appealed to the disciples who had witnessed His work from the beginning. Jesus appeals to us who witness His work in His Word. We have to bear witness. On one hand, this refers to the character of our lives (if it is an indicative mood verb). On the other hand, this can be a command from Christ (if it is an imperative mood verb). Either way, we must live lives that testify of Christ. If we are indwelt with the Holy Spirit, we will seek fellowship with

Jesus; and having been with Jesus, we will testify about Him. And often that simple practice results in persecution.

Are we not tempted to bail out? These warnings and challenges keep us from falling (16:1-4). Jesus was specific about "these things" (vv.2-3). He acknowledged that witnessing for Christ was going to be costly. He warned, *They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God (v.2).* The religious rulers did indeed throw the early Christians out of the temple and barred them from synagogues. According to tradition, all of these eleven disciples except for John were executed for their faithful witness.

Jesus warned that persecution would flow from a common cause that Jesus had already identified. *And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me (v.3).* Sinners reject God even though many of them talk about Him or about a being they invent to replace Him. But they miss the fact that God the Father is the rightful Master and King of every created being. Because people sin against God by rejecting His reign in their lives, they naturally reject Jesus as Savior and King. And that is why they persecute us. How then should we live in such circumstances?

Jesus provides strength for times of trouble. Remembering Jesus' words is critical. *But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you (v.4a).* Jesus challenges us His followers to be familiar with His words. We need to know His word, and we need to be able to apply Jesus' teaching to difficult circumstances.

Furthermore, He Himself is the source of strength. He told the disciples, *I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you (v.4b).* During His ministry, Jesus was present to strengthen the disciples. After His ascension, Jesus was present in the Holy Spirit to strengthen them even as He does us now. Why was He so faithful to provide encouragement? The goal is to keep us from falling. *I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away (v.1).* D. A. Carson concluded that "The greatest danger is not death but apostasy." Falling away from the truth cannot be an option for us. True Christians have died for centuries, and continue to die, but are immediately in the presence of our Savior. False professors

reject the truth they have heard and are forever lost to eternal condemnation.

That citizens of the United States are facing genuine persecution because of their faith in God's Word is shocking to some people. America has been an abnormal culture since her founding by Pilgrims in 1620. We are finally, after almost 400 years, becoming a normal culture where the influence of Satan is being felt through sinners who are in charge. As in every age and every culture including Jesus' day, sinners reject God and therefore reject God the Son, and therefore reject us who love and serve Him. Hatred from the world is the norm. Christ provides the love, the strength, and the wisdom to live with it.