

The World that Hates Christ Hates You – *John 15:18 – 16:4*

Introduction – The Farewell Discourse now takes a sober turn. Much turmoil is just around the corner for Jesus. But just on the heels of that, hatred and persecution will be directed at His followers. There is a cost to following Jesus. He was savagely opposed despite his ministry of healing and godly teaching. And so will it go for those who follow Him. “*All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted*” (1 Tim 3:12).

Overview of the Text – Abiding in Christ is real, and so if the world hates Him, you can darn well bet, they will hate you too (v18). The antithesis demands this; He chose you out of the world and put you on their enemy’s team (v19). Jesus had said that a servant is not greater than his master, and this applies not only to serving one another in love, but in suffering persecution from the world (v20). Those who persecute faithful Christians are proving they do not know God (v21), and they can’t say they hate Jesus without proving that in fact they hate the Father (vv22-24). This fulfilled the words of the prophets (v25). When the Holy Spirit comes upon you all, He will bear witness (Gr: *martureo* - *martyr*) of Me and then you will do so as well (vv26-27). Note: this is a good place to highlight the first application of this discourse is directed to the apostles who “*...have been with (Jesus) from the beginning*” (v27). Jesus warns them now so they don’t apostatize when it happens (v1) for those who oppose them will kick them out of the synagogues and even kill them, thinking they are sincerely serving God (v2), again, proving they don’t know the Father or His Son (v3). Finally, Jesus tells them these things before they happen that they might remember things are not out of His control when they do (v4).

The Inevitable Antithesis Around Us – The world will hate Christians because the Holy Spirit dwells in us, testifying of Jesus as the Light of the world, making us sons of Light, a Light they hate (John 3:19-20). There is an antithesis in this world among all humanity, two teams as it were, set at enmity towards one another. They are the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman (Gen 3:15). When God accepts our righteous offerings while refusing to accept the offerings of the sons of Cain, envy, hatred, and murders follow (Gen 4:1-5). This is why the world hates followers of Christ and always will (1 John 3:13). We smell like death to those who are perishing (2 Cor 2:16). The way of Cain is to seek one’s own self-justification while reacting in anger and revenge against those whose words and actions condemn their words and actions. They will hate our lives of grace and our love of righteousness, and they will seek to condemn our beliefs in the name of tolerance, enlightenment, liberty, along with redefined righteousness and religion.

Inevitable Persecution – The antithesis always existed, but now, the gospel will go forth with the power and witness of the Holy Spirit. Jesus tells them to expect great conflict. He says they will hate you because they hate Me (v18, 20, 6:2). Christians are those who have been “*chosen out of the world*” (v19), a world that is under the wrath of God “*...against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness...*” (Rom 1:18ff). The ones who claim to know the Truth and have a standard of righteousness according to Christ will be suppressed – one way or another. This is why you have that tendency to hide, downplay, make light of your faith when you are among those of the world. Today, the wrath of God upon our world is more and more evident; He has given us up to uncleanness, “*...in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves...*” (Rom 1:24ff). So it is never simply that you are preaching Jesus, but that you are calling what they call “good” “evil.” They see you as a son of Abel and begin to do what any son of Cain would.

“These Things I Have Told You...” (16:1-4) – Jesus says these things to those disciples who would soon undergo this persecution. Peter would deny the Lord Jesus that evening. But fifty days after the Resurrection, at Pentecost, full of the Holy Spirit, a fiery-tongued testimony came forth (15:24-25, Acts 2:22-24, 32-36). Peter is arrested at least three times for preaching Christ (Acts 4, 5, 12) and when writing to the dispersed Jews after the persecution in Jerusalem scattered them all over the empire, he told them not to think it strange to find themselves persecuted even more (1 Pet 4:12-19).

James, the brother of John, was killed with a sword (Acts 12:2) and John was exiled to Patmos (Rev 1:9). Early church historians testify that all of the other apostles were martyred in various places (from Egypt to India, Armenia to Rome).

Paul began (under his Hebrew name, Saul) his persecution of the church as a “*righteous Pharisee*,” arresting, imprisoning, and seeing to the death of Christians, thinking “*he offers God service*” (John 16:2). But God often puts down His enemies by making them His friends (Acts 9:3-5). Time and again, Paul, on his missionary journeys, was “*put out of the synagogues*” (John 16:2) where He preached that Jesus was the prophesied Messiah and five times he received the thirty-nine lashes – punishment meted out by synagogue authorities (2 Cor 11:24).

And throughout history, Christians have found themselves in different places and times under severe persecution. Whether dipped in tar and lit as human candles for Nero’s parties, thrown to the lions and wild beasts in colosseums, tortured,

exiled and killed, burned at stakes or imprisoned to starve to death, decimated as a people in mass genocides, history shows that King Jesus threatens worldly powers.

And so, these words of Jesus were no overstatement, exaggeration, or hyperbole. But I think we take it so as we sit in our relatively safe, middle-class homes. Or we used to. Times are changing, authorities are becoming more tyrannical and are pushing their materialistic, egalitarian, anti-Christian, social-Marxism worldviews, all hostile to the gospel. Our Eastern European brothers (who saw their countries experience the bloodiest persecutions in the history of the church during the 20th Century due to atheistic communism) have warned us for decades that they see the beginnings of the same kind of persecutions coming our way – because we are letting them. I fear these words may soon become very clear to us in the near future. Prepare yourselves for the promotion.

Rejoicing in Persecutions – The blessing of suffering not only for but with Jesus in one for which we are called to be truly thankful (Phil 1:29). When Peter and John were publicly beaten for their refusal to cease preaching Christ’s gospel (“*THIS IS A SAFE SPACE*”) they departed, “*rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name*” (Acts 5:41). In the face of persecutions, they prayed for more opportunities to preach the truth (Acts 4:29). Paul asked for the same prayers while in prison (Eph 6:19-20).

The Blessedness of Inevitable Persecution (Matt 5:10-12) – The nature of persecution is not always the shedding of blood but includes (if sometimes begins) with reviling and speaking all kinds of evil against us falsely. This defines the cancel-culture of today. Christians are not despised for having a gentle and general civic kindness, but rather when we stand for Christ and His righteousness. This is of course no excuse for being obnoxious. But neither should it come as a surprise or a sign that we did something wrong when we are persecuted. And then, our response should be to shout for joy and receive our gift, our promotion, our blessing. Apparently, there is nothing wrong with looking forward to the rewards (“*great is your reward in heaven*” v12). In fact, we are to keep our minds fixed on our eternal inheritance with great anticipation (2 Cor 4:17-18).

From Persecution to Victory – Christ was persecuted, crucified, and this led to His atonement for our sins and the salvation of the world. The present rumblings of growing persecution in our land are not signs of the demise of the church. Certainly, a great and deep pruning and sifting may come through persecution. But so will victory. “*In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.*” (John 1:4-5).