



Message: A Call to Persevere
Passage: John 15:18-16:4
Series: The Book of John: Bearing Witness
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I want to be honest with you, the first few verses of our passage this morning stirred my soul this week as I examined my own fear of being hated by the world. I don't want to be hated. And whether it is a rational fear or not, in recent months I've had more concern for the safety of my family, church, and friends because of our stance on issues that are in contrast to our current culture. Why am I afraid when scripture repeatedly says, "Fear not!" I have to ask myself— *is it because I want to be loved by the world? Do I truly love God above my comforts, my wife, my children, even my own life?* I had to fall on my face and repent, for the love of the world had crept in my heart. You might ask— *love of the world? Because you are fearful for your wife and kids? That sounds rational!* Not in the Kingdom of God. We love Jesus above even our own families, for in doing so, we model for them the truest love, and in turn are able to love them with the greatest of love.

Can you examine your own heart this morning? Are you fearful to stand out for Jesus because of the backlash you might experience at work, in your family, or in your neighborhood? Are you afraid of being clumped together with *those people*, and thus, ridiculed, and shamed, and misunderstood? Are you tempted to soften your position on Biblical truths to make them more *palatable* to the ears of the world? Friends, Jesus didn't waver in speaking hard truths. And his word, his deeds, and ultimately his death and resurrection have proven that what he said was true! If he died to give us the truth that saved us to everlasting life, what is the cost of a little tribulation in comparison to eternal life? And what is a little ridicule from the world if sharing the gospel means others may know and have the same truth, same fellowship, and the same love in Christ that we share together?

Our passage is John 15:18-16:4. Would you open your Bibles with me and stand in honor of God's word. Because of the size of the passage, I simply want to make a few observations from the text. We are to ***Prepare to be Persecuted, We Are Hated Because of Him, Proclaiming the Gospel is the Proper Response, and Apostasy is Worse Than Death***

Passage: John 15:18–27

[18] “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. [19] 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. [20] Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. [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. [25] But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: ‘They hated me without a cause.’

[26] “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. [27] And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning. (ESV)

John 16:1–4

[1] “I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. [2] 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. [3] And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. [4] But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you.

[Prayer]

Prepare to be Persecuted (18-14)

The context for this passage is the final week of Jesus' earthly life before the cross. They had gathered together and Jesus had instituted communion. Jesus had washed his disciple's feet, and commanded them to love one another, and serve one another in the same way. He taught them they were to abide in his love, his word, and his commandments, and they would bear fruit for the kingdom. And now in our passage he warned his disciples that they would be treated with the same hatred, the same persecution that he would endure. He was preparing them for persecution. Look at verse 18: *If the world hates you, know that it hated me before you... 20 Remember the word that I have said to you, A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.*

Peter was crucified upside down, and Paul was beheaded by Nero at roughly 66 AD. Tradition has it that Andrew was crucified in modern day Greece, Thomas pierced by spears of soldiers, Philip went to North Africa and converted a wife of a Roman proconsul and for that, was tortured to death. Matthew was said to have been stabbed to death in Ethiopia. Tradition has it that Bartholomew traveled to India, Armenia, Ethiopia and Southern Arabia and we have various reports on his death as a martyr. James was reported by the Jewish historian, Josephus, to have been stoned, and then clubbed to death. Simon was killed in Persia after refusing to sacrifice to the sun god. Mathias, the replacement of Judas, was said to have been burned to death in Syria. John, the writer of this gospel, was burned in oil, though he miraculously lived, and was then exiled to an island to live in a cave. They took comfort, property, homes, and life from those who called themselves servants of Jesus Christ, the King.

Church, are you prepared for persecution? Are you prepared to lose comfort, property, your house, your car, your very life because of Jesus? The real question is this: do you love Jesus more? The test of genuine love for Jesus is not a game of hypothetical questions like— “would you rather eat a jar of mayonnaise or lick a slug.” It is a surety in this world that those who follow Jesus will be hated by the world and suffering will come in response, unto loss of life and limb. Jesus said as much. And if you love the good things of the earth more than Jesus then you too will perish: Matthew 10:37–39 *Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. [38] And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. [39] Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. (ESV)*

Perseverance under persecution is the proof of your salvation. It's proof that you do, indeed, love Jesus more than this world. **Church — prepare to be persecuted!** *Oh Lord, may it be that we can say— “your steadfast love is better than life!”*

How do we do this? How do we prepare — might I suggest fasting? Might I suggest choosing to set aside time in your week to withhold food, or drink, or coffee, or netflix, or Facebook— whatever you go to for comfort, and sacrifice it as worship to God. Take the hypothetical into reality: do I love God more than coffee? Does my body know that? Have I trained my flesh to be under the control of the Spirit of God or the power of caffeine? If we can't go without small things now, how will we endure when true hardship, real persecution happens?

This message also must come with a warning — not every unkind interaction is persecution! Sometimes, people respond to us with contempt because they've had a bad day, or they're hungry and angry- hangry, or because we've wronged them! This is not persecution, this is simply sin responding to sin! Christian, we cannot have a persecution complex, and therefore victimize ourselves. When we do this, we attempt to stand on our own moral high ground when in reality it was the consequence of our actions or happenstance!

So, what is the *what* of persecution. Persecution is the active hate from the world because of your belonging to Jesus (v18-20a). This is not a sub-conscious bias, not because someone has a general preference for non-Christians, but it is an active hate, which leads to actions against you. Look at 16:2-3: *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.*

As a Jew, the synagogue was the center of cultural life. It was proof you belonged to your people! Persecution begins with alienation from society— your own people. Church, I think this has begun here in America. We aren't in the full throws yet, but it is coming. Biblical believers are being ostracized, alienated and condemned by society for holding views on sexuality, gender, marriage, and abortion that are contrary to the world. There are those who call themselves Christians who oppose what the Scriptures say about these issues, and we have to boldly say, If you don't submit to scripture, then you don't submit to Christ! We will be hated for it. We will be persecuted for it. Jesus warned the disciples of this, and we, his disciples 2000 years later, are to expect nothing different. The 12 apostles were Jews, and they were persecuted first by their own people. Paul, before converting to Christ, was on a mission from the Sanhedrin to put

Christians to death. Christians across the globe are being persecuted, even killed, as a service to their religion, or their country.

We are Hated Because of Him

Verse 19 tells us why: *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.*

It feels good to be loved by the world, doesn't it? We want people to think highly of us. The reward of being loved by the world is alluring. It comes with power, influence, prestige, and often monetary reward follows. Or it could be as simple as filling our sinful desire to be adored: How many "likes" can I get on my Facebook post, or instagram? In the kingdom of God, you are promised that you will be hated, because you are not of the world, but have been chosen out of it. Friends, do you want to belong to the world that is under Satan's dominion, that seeks to divide, kill, and destroy life, Satan—who is the force behind racial tensions, genocide, physical and sexual abuse, malice and slander, whom God will judge along with his minions and all who follow him? Or do you want to belong to Jesus, the God who is love, brings joy and peace, holiness, goodness, truth and justice. It comes with a cost. Jesus paid the price of admission, but you will be slandered, hated, and killed as you walk towards the door of heaven.

We have to make note of God's divine mercy. You belong to Christ because he chose you out of the world! This is the doctrine of election. Jesus was making a point of it in this section of scripture. We see it in our previous passage in verse 16: *You did not choose me, but I chose you...* and a bit further back in 13:17: *I know whom I have chosen.* And again in John 10:14: *I am the Good Shepherd, I know my own and they know me...* There's more in John 6, and John 3. If we rightly understand election, then we know the only reason we have come to believe Jesus is the Son of God is because God the Father has revealed it to us. It is a saving mercy we do not deserve, because we, too, were dead in our sin. We will speak more on this later but we must note it here.

We ought to ask the question **why** was Jesus hated? Have you ever considered—*why is it that the name of our Lord is used as a curse word?* Why is it that Him whom we call Savior was slain as criminal? The text gives us the answer:

[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.*

The word Jesus spoke revealed that all mankind is condemned before a holy God, and that he was the only way to be saved. That is the message of John 3:16. We memorize the first verse but fail to read the next 5. Here it is: [16] *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. [17] For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. [18] Whoever believes in him is not condemned, **but whoever does not believe is condemned already**, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. [19] **And this is the judgment:** the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. [20] For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. [21] But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”* (ESV)

These are the words of Jesus to the world: *You are condemned in your sin. You cannot save yourself. You love the darkness rather than the light. Your only hope of eternal life is to come to me, to let your darkness be exposed, and trust in me to save you. There is no other way...*

This message is the sound of a beautiful melody because you have come to recognize your sinfulness and your need before God and you rejoice in His love and grace, or it is the sound of fingernails on a chalkboard because you detest the thought that you are judged by God as having an evil and rebellious heart, and your own works aren't good enough to save you. You reject both the true assessment of your soul, and the very God who offers to save you.

This was Jesus message in verse 22-24.

[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 has come and made clear to all that no one is righteous. With his message he both reveals the cancer of sin, and offers surgery of the soul to cut it out. Will you hate the doctor for revealing your cancer? Will you hate the only doctor who can remove it, and save your life? This is what Jesus revealed had happened. And those who deny him hate both Jesus and the Father. But... all of this was...

According to His Sovereign Will (v25)

[25] But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: 'They hated me without a cause.'

Jesus was quoting Psalm 69:4, a Psalm of David. In doing so, he was interpreting the Psalm as a Messianic psalm, and himself the Son of David who would take the throne of Israel for eternity. We must acknowledge that the hatred, betrayal, and death of Jesus our Lord was planned by God and foretold in scripture. Peter, in Acts chapter 2:23, said, *This: Jesus [was] delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God...* The crucifixion of Christ was not a cosmic accident! It was written in the scriptures, and it was written for our encouragement! This was the very reason Jesus prepared his disciples for persecution. It was meant to encourage their faith in His Sovereign will. Look at chapter 16:4 *But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you.*

If Christ's suffering was not a cosmic accident, then neither is yours! It was foretold to his disciples. Suffering and persecution are a normal part of the Christian life. Here is what Peter wrote in his first epistle:

1 Peter 4:12–19

[12] Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. [13] But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. [14] If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. [15] But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. [16] Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name....

So, don't be surprised when the fiery trial comes! But instead, rejoice to share in Christ's sufferings! Rejoice that you belong to him, are identified with him, and his glory will be revealed through you! Don't be ashamed, but glorify God! Then he made this statement in verse 19: *Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.* (ESV)

Your suffering is according to God's will. His word has promised it. Don't be alarmed, but rejoice because your salvation is proving true. ***Perseverance under persecution is the proof.*** So... *how are we to respond in persecution?*

Proclaiming the Gospel is the Proper Response (26-27)

[26] *“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. [27] And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning. (ESV)*

When persecution arrives, will you cave, denounce the faith, change your position in order to dodge the discomfort of being hated? This is apostasy. This is abandoning the word of God, the very thing Jesus commanded you to abide in. Will you become hardened, and respond with hate? Will you make an enemy out of God’s image bearers—whom we are told to bless, to pray for, even while we are persecuted? Do you have a hardened heart towards people who oppose you now? Are you arrogant towards unbelievers? Recall with me a few verse back—Jesus said *“I chose you out of this world.”* The application of election is this: mercy for those around you, because you know it’s only by the sheer grace of God that you are in His kingdom! If you respond in arrogance or anger towards unbelievers, towards the world who hates you, this means you don’t understand the grace of God that saved you out of the world! Believers, *we are not saved* because we’re smarter, better, wiser, or spiritually and morally awakened. We have been saved because he loved us before the foundation of the world, before we could do anything right or wrong. We can’t grasp it, other than to say, *God is in the heavens and he does all that he pleases (Psa 115:3).*

So, how are we to respond? Our response—the biblical response to persecution is to do the very thing we are persecuted for. We are to testify that Jesus is the Son of God, to bear witness to his gospel, and the truth of His word. This is verse 27. Friends, yours and my suffering testifies to the truth of the gospel we believe. It is evidence to the world that we have the Spirit of God. ***When the clouds of persecution come, when hatred and disdain come towards you, your call is not to hide but to shine even greater!*** Love is still the call — pray for those who hate you, bless those who persecute you. Share the gospel for the love of God compels you.

Penn Jillette, an atheist and magician on the show, Penn & Teller, was given a Gideon Bible by a man after a show. Penn noted that man was appreciative, genuine, and kind in his words. The man, when handing him the Bible, openly said he was proselytizing. He gave him his number, email address, and so forth and invited him to have a conversation about the gospel. Penn recorded a short video response on Youtube, and here is what he said:

“I’ve always said,¹ I don’t respect people who don’t proselytize. I don’t respect that at all. If you believe there is a heaven and hell, and people could be going to hell or not getting eternal life or whatever, and you think it’s not really worth telling them this because it would make it socially awkward. How much do you have to hate somebody to not proselytize? How much do you have to hate someone to believe everlasting life is possible and not tell them that?”

“If I believed, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that a truck was coming at you, and you didn’t believe it, [and] that truck was bearing down on you, there’s a certain point that I tackle you, and this is more important than that.”

He finished like this: I know there’s no God, and one polite person living his life right doesn’t change that, but I’ll tell you, he was a very, very, very good man. And that’s really important. And with that kind of goodness, it’s okay to have that deep of a disagreement.”

I do believe the heart with which we proclaim the gospel is extremely important. It will not always be received, or appreciated the way Penn appreciated this gentlemen, but the point remains, if God’s love has been poured into our heart, and if it was his love for the world that sent his son to die on the cross, then that same love compels us to proclaim the gospel. Do you love the people around you? Do you love your neighbors? Do you pray for them, and for opportunities to share Jesus with them? How about your co-workers, your family and community members? If you do, does it make any sense that you would withhold the gospel? As Penn said, would you tackle someone whom a truck is bearing down on? This is more important than that...

Which leads me to our last point.

¹ <https://churchpop.com/2016/01/16/atheist-penn-jillette-christians-evangelize/>

Apostasy Is Worse Than Death! (16:1-5)

[1] “I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. [2] 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. [3] And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. [4] But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you.

Why did Jesus warn his disciples? Because there is a greater threat than death! There is a greater threat than being persecuted! A greater threat than a truck barreling down on you—it is apostasy, denying Jesus, and thereby forfeiting eternal life.

In the end, and even now, we must ask ourselves— do we love him more than our comforts? Do we love him more than our family? More than our own life? If Jesus is who he said he is, if indeed he has risen from the dead, then what do we have to fear? He has power over life and death, and he promised that we would raise with him and live for eternity. As Jesus said in Matthew 10: *do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell... [32] So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, [33] but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven. (ESV)*

Apostasy is worse than death. Apostasy means life in torment without Christ. So what is our encouragement this morning? To remember the greater treasure for which we live. Remember this treasure abides in you, and gives you power to withstand persecution. We read this in 2 Corinthians 4:7–18

[7] But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. [8] We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; [9] persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; [10] always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. [11] For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. [12] So death is at work in us, but life in you...

[16] So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. [17] For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, [18] as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.