

31. The World Hates the Disciples

John 15:18-16:4

Warm-up Question: When you were young, did you have anyone, brother, sister or friend that used to antagonize or tease you? What did they do?

¹⁸“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. ¹⁹If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. ²⁰Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. ²¹They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me. ²²If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin. ²³Whoever hates me hates my Father as well. ²⁴If I had not done among them the works no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. As it is, they have seen, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. ²⁵But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: ‘They hated me without reason.’ ²⁶“When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me. ²⁷And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning. ^{16:1}“All this I have told you so that you will not fall away. ²They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God. ³They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. ⁴I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you about them. I did not tell you this from the beginning because I was with you (John 15:18-16:4).

The World Hates Disciples of Christ

The passage that we are studying here gives us an inside view of what happened the last night before Jesus was to be crucified. The disciples and Jesus have now enjoyed their last supper together and the end of chapter fourteen tells us that they all leave the Upper Room and are on their way to the Garden of Gethsemane, (which means the place of the Olive Press). Judas had already left to betray Christ to the religious leaders. Tradition tells us that the Upper Room of the Last Supper was to the west of the Temple Mount of Jerusalem. This room was the same room where the disciples were filled with the Spirit fifty days later at the Feast of Pentecost. The Garden of Gethsemane was four or five hundred yards to the East of the Temple Mount, so it is very likely that Jesus stopped within viewing distance of the great golden grapevine that was draped across the four columns at the entrance to the Temple (see earlier study, Jesus the True Vine, pg. 2). It is possible that His teaching about Himself being the true vine at the beginning of chapter 15 was within view of this golden vine hanging at the temple entrance. He had a meeting with Judas still an hour or two ahead of Him in the garden of Gethsemane. It is in this context that He bares His heart with His disciples to prepare them for the difficulties that lay ahead for them. As we picture this scene, consider this; even in Christ’s darkest hour, His own dark night of the soul, His concern for those He loves overshadows His

own pain. This is our Jesus! Even though He knows what is going to happen in the next hours during that sleepless night, He is thinking more about His disciples than Himself. It tells us a lot about the Shepherd's care and love for His sheep. He doesn't make it flowery, but speaks reality to them. The Lord tells them that because He has called them out of the world, just as He has been hated, they will be hated also.

When Jesus tells them that the world will hate them (verse 18), what is He referring to? What does He mean in using the word "world." Doesn't God love the world?

We are all in a battle, whether we want to acknowledge it or not. All of humanity is in the midst of a cosmic battleground between unseen spirits that are influencing what goes on in the world of flesh and blood individuals. Satan, the adversary and enemy of all true Christian believers, leads these evil angelic beings and demons in a war to keep control of this world. The Bible tells us that Satan is the god, prince, or ruler of this world:

³¹Now is the judgment of this world; now will **the ruler of this world** be cast out (John 12:31).

³⁰I will no longer talk much with you, for **the ruler of this world** is coming. He has no claim on me (John 14:30).

There is a difference in the physical planet which has been created by God, and the world that we are told not to love:

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them (1 John 2:15).

The physical world does not have a mind, so it cannot be evil and hate the disciples. The world that Jesus is talking about is the world system that hates the Lord Jesus and all disciples (A disciple is one who embraces and assists in spreading the teachings of another). The world system is the way that Satan, the god of this world, has set up the world and its values in opposition to the Lord. John goes on further to elaborate the meaning of "the world" in this passage:

¹⁶For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever (1 John 2:15-17).

The world is comprised of human society organizing itself apart from and without God. The world will always be in opposition to the church of the Lord Jesus Christ as long as we are bringing the things that are done in darkness into the light. We have been commissioned by the Lord Jesus to do all we can to plunder Satan's fallen world system and rescue precious people that Christ has died to redeem. If you doubt that many things about this world, the higher schools of education, music, politics, work places, and yes, even religion, are in opposition to God and His Son, go into the higher echelons of the

society you live in and preach the gospel of the Lord Jesus and see what happens! There will be opposition and you will be persecuted for your faith. ¹²In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted (2 Timothy 3:12).

The world is suspicious of people with different values, goals and aspirations to the way the world is set up. If you start to do things differently than the way of this world, do not be surprised if you are viewed with a watchful eye. If you are more overt about your faith, antagonism and persecution will surely come. Jesus warned the disciples that this would be the norm and that we are to expect it, not only for those listening to Him as He spoke, but also for us living in the twenty first century. The tide is turning even in these United States of America. By saying this, I am not saying that we, as Christians, should shun or hide from the world. People in all walks of life and in all social classes need to hear the good news, and we need to follow God in whatever business, learning institution or situation we are in. Every Christian should follow the leading of the Holy Spirit and not fear to be in the world, but seek to shine the light of Christ where you are. However, if we are entangled with the world, how will we stand out as being different? How will we attract others with the light of Christ if it is dimmed through the entrapments of this world? People are looking for real life and where it is evident, there will be fruit resulting in people being drawn to Christ. This will not happen if you are indistinguishable from the world. If this is your condition, ask God to ignite the fire within you of passion for Christ and seek to be freed from love of the world.

Are there major entrapments that you see in your society that are hard to avoid? What are they? Do you feel that these things or activities hold you back from being devoted to God?

My wife, Sandy, and I once went with a few other individuals from our church in England to a different town to share Christ with people we met on the streets. We met with resistance as we walked up to eight or nine bikers. We started talking to them about the Lord Jesus, and we were met with ridicule and animosity. As we talked with them, each one tried to out do the others in their bravado. One of them especially seemed to outperform the others. He became somewhat vitriolic in his opposition. Thinking we were just making them angry, we left to join up with the rest of our group, and guess who later walked in the door with some of the other members of our team? The same man that was in such opposition to us! We were amazed at the change in the man; he was now so amenable and humble. He made a decision for Christ that night. There is a saying that goes like this; that if you throw a stone among a pack of dogs, the one that yelps the loudest is the one that got hit! If someone reacts to the Gospel, or to your testimony, it could be that they are dealing with the conviction of the Holy Spirit working in their heart.

Living around you, perhaps even working with you, are those who are directed and ruled by a different spirit than the One who lives with you:

¹As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ²in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of

the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient (Ephesians 2:1-2).

If you are a disciple and seek to represent Jesus, you should not be surprised if you get a response of disdain and anger. Remember that you are not alone. The Lord is with you and working in the heart of the one you are sharing Christ with. People have all types of responses, but we cannot know what is going on in their hearts. The Lord, however, does see their heart and will testify to His Word by the Holy Spirit. There will always be those who respond to God's loving invitation, and those who refuse. Where the truth of God's Word is shining, there will be spiritual warfare, and often persecution.

God is not the Author of Persecution but Why Does He Allow it?

There is a depth of weakness in ourselves and deeper trust in God that comes to us when we go through persecution for our faith. As far as we know, Paul the apostle suffered more for his faith than any other in the early days of the Church, but he came to a place in his life where he viewed that the power of Christ rested upon him greatly when he was at his weakest and most vulnerable:

⁹But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. ¹⁰That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

When we are weak in ourselves, God grants that His power rests on us and uses us. Trust that God will use your words powerfully. Paul the apostle spoke boldly for Christ amongst deep-seated opposition in various cities of the ancient world. When he came to Corinth in Greece there was opposition from religious folk who were abusive to him (Acts 18:5-6), but what do we see as a result? The Lord was calling people through his words and drawing many to Himself:

⁹And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, ¹⁰ for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, **for I have many in this city who are my people.**" ¹¹And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them (Acts 18:9-11).

The Lord was encouraging Paul that even in the midst of the opposition and hatred of his message, there were many in that city that God had foreordained to eternal life and that Paul would have great success. Wouldn't it be easier if He would just show us all that are foreordained to life? Sometimes we just don't know what God will do if we are simply obedient to share the gospel with those around us. God is able to give great fruit from our lives if we will trust him, even in persecution. Take for instance, Paul the apostle. Did you know that he was converted to Christianity from radical Judaism after he saw Stephen being stoned to death? Many years after Paul had given his life to Christ, in sharing his story of what had turned him around, he said that the Lord had spoken to him

when He revealed Himself to Saul/Paul on the Damascus road:

¹⁴And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? **It is hard for you to kick against the goads**' (Acts 26:14).

What do you think the Lord meant when He said that it was hard for Saul/Paul to kick against the goads? Jesus was in heaven, so what did He mean when He said that Paul was persecuting Him?

Have you ever wondered what the Lord was talking about in describing Paul as kicking against the goads? First of all, what is a goad? A goad was a long pole sharpened at the end. It was used to prick the backside of the oxen when plowing a field to goad the ox to attention when he had stopped plowing the field. Being pricked by the goad speaks of being under conviction and continually rejecting/kicking back against the conviction. If you are under conviction by the Holy Spirit trying to get through to you, don't spend the rest of your life regretting your life before you met Christ like Paul did. Give in right now and get your life in line to the Lord's Will for you. In talking about Paul being goaded, the Lord was reminding Paul of the time when the new believers in Christ had been under extreme persecution by the Jewish religious leaders. The Jewish religious leaders had opposed Stephen, one of the servants in the early church, because he spoke powerfully for Christ among great opposition (Acts 6:9). His face had shone like an angel with the presence of God on him (Acts 6:15). Saul, one of the religious leaders, (whose name was changed to Paul), had seen this visible display of God's presence and power in the midst of the persecution against the servant of Christ. When Stephen began powerfully speaking again for God, the Jewish religious people could take no more, they stoned him to death before all the witnesses as Stephen responded with forgiveness for them all:

⁵⁷But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. ⁵⁸Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments **at the feet of a young man named Saul**. ⁵⁹And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "**Lord, do not hold this sin against them.**" And when he had said this, he fell asleep. ^{8:1}And **Saul approved of his execution**. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles (Acts 7:57-8:1).

I think that God began a work in Saul/Paul when he witnessed Stephen being stoned to death with the glory of God on him and breathing out forgiveness for those that were putting him to death. Could there be any more powerful testimony? I believe that Stephen has a share in the eternal rewards and fruit that came from Paul's ministry for the trust that he showed in the midst of persecution. It impacted Paul to the point that He was convicted, even though he himself had been a hater of those who followed Christ. We never know what God will do in the middle of any suffering that we may go through for

Him.

Why Will Persecution of the Disciples Occur?

²⁰Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. ²¹They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me (John 15:20-21).

What does it mean to be in the world but not of the world? How do you see Christians being persecuted today, and what is behind this?

We are not to hide away from this world but we are to confront and bring an opposite spirit onto the battleground. Spirit knows spirit. What do I mean by that? The evil spirit of this world is stronger on some more than others. The more a person gives himself or herself to the spirit of this world, the more they are governed and controlled by that same spirit. When the spirit of this world is leading a person, they are able to recognize if the name of the Lord is on you. Remember you have been bought with a price, you are not your own. When you gave your life to the Lord, you were sealed by the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30), and because of that fact, those with an opposite spirit, will react to the Spirit’s anointing and authority on you. When the seven sons of Sceva tried to cast out an evil spirit, the evil spirit knew that the young men were not Christians and did not recognize the spirit of Christ on them. It was a big mistake for them:

13 Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, “In the name of the Jesus whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out.” **14** Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. **15** One day the evil spirit answered them, “**Jesus I know, and Paul I know about, but who are you?**” **16** Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding (Acts 19:13-16 Emphasis mine).

Jesus said that they would treat you this way because the name of your God is on you. The spirit of the world sees the Spirit of God on you.

The Helper (Counselor) Will Be With Us

²⁶“When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me. ²⁷And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning (John 15:26-27).

They were to wait for the Holy Spirit to come; He would be their Helper, their Paraclete, the one called alongside to help them. The coming of the Spirit on them on the Day of Pentecost would counteract this spiritual battle that would be waged against them by the spirit of the world. As the Lord Jesus looked around at the eleven that night, He

reminded them that the Spirit's coming would help them to endure through persecution and the opposition that He knew would come. I'm sure the disciples did not like the way the conversation was going, but the Lord knew all things and they had come to a solid trust in Him and His words. He warned them then, before it happened, just what would happen. They would be put out of the synagogues, and anyone who killed them would think they were doing God a service:

^{16:1}“All this I have told you so that you will not fall away. ²They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God. ³They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. ⁴I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you about them. I did not tell you this from the beginning because I was with you (John 16:1-4).

To be put out of the synagogue was a disaster for a Jewish person in the time of Jesus. Friendship and community life was built around the synagogue. What the disciple's were hearing from the lips of Jesus would not have come across well. We are not to sugarcoat the gospel to those that we lead to the Lord. There may be difficult times ahead for all those of us who are in Christ Jesus. The Bible tells us that there is a time ahead in the end times where many will fall away from the faith.

⁹“Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. ¹⁰At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other (Matthew 24:9-10. Also 2 Thessalonians 2:3).

Just as the early disciples were empowered by the Spirit coming in power, I believe that the difficulties that the Church will endure will cast us on to the Lord and great power will be given in those days, if we are the ones that are called to go through such a time of persecution. When we think of the word “martyrs”, we tend to think of the past. We think of the days of the early Church. However, did you know that the word martyr is more applicable to our day, to today, than to any time in the history of the world? During this century alone, more Christians have been killed for their faith than in all the previous centuries combined. Think about that for a moment. Christians have suffered persecution in countries such as China, the Soviet Union, Romania, Albania, Cuba, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Indonesia, Sudan, India, Syria, Egypt, and the list goes on and on.

In 1563, John Foxe began a memorial of martyrs starting with Stephen, and ending with the most recent martyrs of his day; those killed during Bloody Mary's reign. Foxe's Book of Martyrs has recently been updated to include those who have suffered for Christ in this century, but it is already out of date, as persecution has increased since it was published in 2001.

Here is one just one story from the New version of the Foxe's Book of Martyrs. It is from the Bamboo Curtain, 1969, and bears resemblance to the stoning of Stephen:

An eyewitness report was received about the deaths of several Christians in a Communist labor camp. A young girl was bound hand and foot and made to kneel in the center of a circle of people who were commanded to stone her or be shot. Several Christians refused and were immediately shot. The girl died under a hail of stones- her face shining like that said of St. Stephen when he was stoned. Later, one of those who threw the stones broke down and received Christ as Savior.¹

God has not left us alone. He is with us, He has told us that He will never leave us, and will never forsake us. Just as the Lord told the disciples that they were to be those that will stand bravely for the Lord, we also are to bravely speak against evil when it rears its ugly head in our time.

[Have you ever experienced scorn or hostility because of your faith in Christ? Share what happened.](#)

Bishop Theodoret of Cyprus tells us of a man named Telemachus, who lived in or about 400 AD. He grew up as a non-religious man and gave himself to worldly pleasures. He spent many years trying to find meaning to his life, until he was told that the Lord Jesus had died on the cross to deliver him from his sin. Becoming a Christian he had a remarkable turnaround to his life, he entered a monastery and became a monk. In the year 402 AD, while in prayer, the young monk felt the Lord speaking to him to leave the monastery and just as he had been told about Christ, he was to share with others the same message. The Lord was very specific as to where to go. It was many miles westward to Rome. Not sure as to why he should travel to Rome, he went on the long trek being obedient to the call. When he got to Rome, he got caught up in the crowd; hundreds of people were excitedly going somewhere. He wasn't sure where they were going, but his curiosity got the better of him as he was swept up in the crowd. Whatever it was, he was not going to miss out on it. In just a few moments he found himself inside the Roman Coliseum. The Romans had just defeated the Goths and a big victory celebration was going on in honor of the emperor. In front of the emperor's box stood the gladiators. "We, who are about to die, salute you," they cried out in unison. Instantly, Telemachus recalled being told about the gladiator games, but the monks had thought that it was just a legend. Now he found out that it was true.

As the gladiators began to fight, arms were hacked off and blood was everywhere, with the crowd crying out for more. Men were dying in front of Telemachus as the crowd got into an ecstasy at the senseless brutality. Not only was he sickened by what he saw in the arena, but also by what he saw among the spectators. In that instant he realized that it must stop. From his seat, he yelled out to the gladiators: "IN THE NAME OF JESUS STOP!" But no one heard above the frenzy of the crowd.

The New Foxe's Book of Martyrs updated 2001- updated by Harold J. Chadwick. Published by Bridge-Logos Publishers, Gainesville FL. Pg. 329

Almost without thinking, he jumped over the wall into the battle arena of the fighters. The gladiators were surprised at this unexpected intrusion and momentarily stopped fighting as Telemachus shouted again at the top of his voice, "IN THE NAME OF JESUS STOP!" The crowd of spectators thought that this was all part of the fight and began laughing at what they thought was a clown in the midst of the blood and gore. One of the gladiators took a swing at Telemachus with his sword, just barely missing him. With that, the other gladiators came toward him with their swords. Telemachus shouted out again and again at the top of his voice, "IN THE NAME OF JESUS STOP!" The crowd stopped laughing as they heard clearly what he was commanding in the name of the Lord. He began to dodge the gladiator's swords, shouting with each passing moment, "For the love of Christ, Stop!" "In the name of Jesus, Stop!" When the dust settled, there laid Telemachus on the ground with a sword in his chest. There was utter silence in the crowd. It was said in that moment, that his words still echoed in the coliseum, "In the name of Christ, Stop." After what seemed like an eternity, one man after another got up from his seat, and left in complete silence and disbelief.

The sight of the dead monk in the center of the coliseum, and the reaction of the crowd, also led the emperor and his guests to silently stand, turn and leave the coliseum. After a few minutes, the Gladiators put their swords down and they too left. All that remained in that giant coliseum was the scrawny lifeless body of the young monk. History claims that this was the very last gladiator game at the coliseum. The memory of that man screaming to the crowd, and the image of the bloodthirsty lust of the crowd had changed the hearts and the minds of the Romans in that instant. Within the hour the emperor issued an edict forbidding any future games of war within the Roman Empire.

There was no more killing in the Coliseum. There were no more gladiator matches in Rome. There was no more killing as sport. All because one man stood up and said, "In the Name of Jesus Stop!" Jesus came to go against the flow of this world, to take a stand against the spirit that is at work in this world, and to deliver everyone who will respond to His message of love. Brothers and sisters in Christ, the spirit of this world would have us compromise instead of standing our ground against evil, and shouting along with Telemachus, "In the Name of Jesus, Stop!" We too might be killed for our faith, but this world is not all there is, there is an eternity to enjoy with our Lord the other side of the veil of death. We need to look at the ways of this world and take our stand to the things that cause injustice, pain, bitterness, anger, and murder. In the name of Jesus, Stop! When we see the oppression of our neighbors, when we see the greed of our leaders, when we see the system failing those who need the system the most, we need to stand up and say; IN THE NAME OF JESUS STOP.

Prayer: Father, we do pray for all those that are suffering for the name of Christ in the days in which we live. Deliver them and us from evil. If you have allowed persecution to come to those reading these words, our prayer, Father, is for grace to help them in the midst of weakness. May your power and your glory rest upon your suffering Church, in Jesus' name! Amen

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