



John 16:1-4
Be Ready for Persecution

John 16:1 "These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble.

2 "They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service.

3 "And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me.

4 "But these things I have told you, that when the time comes, you may remember that I told you of them. And these things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you.

You know its interesting, if you are like me as you read the words of Christ, again and again you find yourself reading things that make you go “huh?” The things He says things that make you go “huh?” precisely because they go counter to the way that we would think about something.

For instance, if we want to get someone to do something and keep doing it, what we usually do is tell them how wonderful it is going to be, we downplay the negatives, if they are going to be there we tell them they’ll be minor – “patients taking this wonderful life enhancing miracle medication may experience some minor, mild, side-effects.”

But Jesus has been talking about some pretty frightening negative things with his disciples. He has been saying if you are my followers the world will not like you, the world will hate you, the world will persecute you, the world will make you an outcast, the world will *kill* you. And the reason that Jesus is telling them that is so that they will not turn away but *keep* following him. *These things I have spoken to you that you should not be made to stumble.* Now at this point, someone might say, that’s not how you motivate people, you tell them only the good stuff.

Ah but kids think about this, suppose I were to say to you, come join me on a holiday, we are going to go to the most incredible place ever, better than ANYTHING you’ve ever experienced. It’ll be like every amusement park rolled up into one. And the journey there will be fun to and soooo easy, we’ll meet lots of friendly people, you won’t have any trouble, the weather will be great, and it’ll just be fun, fun, fun all the time. But then when you start out, it’s immediately difficult, people aren’t friendly in fact they are frightening, the road is difficult and seems to be all uphill and the weather is terrible, and you start getting hurt. Would you keep going? Probably not, in fact you might say, if he lied to me about what the *journey* would be like, why should I believe him about what the *destination* will be like?

So Jesus who told his disciples the truth about how wonderful heaven really is also tells his disciples the hard truth about how hard their journey there is going to be. He tells them and you that their journey to heaven is not going to be all health and wealth and the world liking them more and more

everyday, He says it will involve tribulation and it *will* involve being persecuted. Far from promising all sunshine and ease, Jesus says in Luke 9:23, ***"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."***

Yes to follow Jesus involves persecution, but via another one of those **"huh?"** statements, he encourages us to think very differently about persecution. What do I mean by that? Well when you say to someone "what a blessing" or "you've been really blessed" you are usually **not** describing something painful they didn't enjoy like a car crash or being fired, you are describing something they wanted to happen. They got a raise at work, they recover from an illness, they have baby and so on. These are all things we would call blessings.

So it might cause us to say "huh?" when Jesus describes something painful that most people don't look forward to or enjoy as "a blessing" but He does:

Matt. 5:10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.

12 "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Jesus says to them not only expect persecution, but when you are persecuted for His sake, don't think of it as sign that you are cursed, but blessed - look at it as a sign you are in the right company and on the right path and headed to the right destination. See it as a sign in fact, that you have taken up your cross and are following Jesus. And so when it happens remember He told you it would, and He told you it is a sign not of God's hate, but of God's love. Because beloved the worst thing that can happen to someone is not pain, not death, but to live and die without Christ. For the professing Christian the worst thing that can happen is that would stop following Jesus.

Now, Jesus hasn't emphasized these points to his disciples up to now because it wasn't necessary, He had so many other things to tell them, and because He was with them, the hatred of the world and the devil has been primarily focused on Him. **"these things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you."** Even now, as He is being betrayed, the Sanhedrin thought of His followers as so inconsequential, that no order to arrest them with Him was issued. So there is no argument when he says later to those who arrest Him in the garden, "let these go their way."

But that will change when He is ascended, the hatred of the world will be focused on the Apostles. Why? Well Jesus tells them it is because although the people who hate them may have a form of religion, as the high priests did, they did not have the power behind it – **"they have not known the Father nor Me."** They claimed to know God, but it is impossible to know Him other than as He is revealed through the Son - *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."* Those who have come to the Father have always done so via repentance and faith in Jesus, whether it was faith in Him as coming Messiah, as Job said **"For I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth;"** or through faith in Him as He came.

They didn't have this faith, so the presence of Jesus made the very religious Pharisees and the priests and Saducees very angry because inwardly it exposed the sin in their heart, they were in the presence of the Holy God, whom they were in rebellion to, and it showed just how pitiful their works and their righteousness and their traditions really were. So they hated Him. Now the same thing happens with

Christ's followers. I don't need to point to all the places where it happened in Acts, you've probably experienced it yourself haven't you - sometimes coworkers or even family will just lash out at you with an irrational rage. You'll think what did I do to deserve that? You don't realize it, but deep down you have exposed their own sin to them, and in that moment that happens are only ever going to get one of two reactions, either ANGER or on those happy occasions when the Spirit is at work, CONVICTION. To quote D.A. Carson "*Not to know God is to spawn hostility to those who do*"

So Jesus warns not the secular authorities alone but the RELIGIOUS leaders are going to persecute you and they will think, as Saul did before his conversion, that they are doing a God a service. And You have to remember that this was **shocking** to the ears of the Apostles, it meant that the majority of the covenant people were NOT going to follow the Messiah. "*That came as bombshell, because it heralded the descent of the church of the Old Testament into a Judaic cult, which is what Judaism is to this day.*" – Gordon Keddie. That too has continued hasn't it. In so many instances it has been the religious who have persecuted the Christians. First it was the Jewish religious authorities, then the Romans who persecuted the Christians for their repudiation of their God's and called them "atheoi" or Atheists, then we have the Muslims who waged and are still waging a Jihad to cleanse the world of Christianity, then of course the long years of persecution of believers by the Roman Catholic church. And it goes on to this day.

Applications:

1) I am convinced that this is one of the most important truths of the Christian faith and one that we desperately need to recover. Persecution really is the norm for the Christian faith. 2 Tim. 3:12 "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." NOT SOME but ALL.

We sometimes forget that, because following the Reformation in England and the United States, Christianity has been either accepted or at least tolerated. But brothers and sisters, persecution, and in some cases TERRIBLE persecution, has been the norm for centuries for your brothers and sisters and is today. More Christians died in the 20th century for their faith, than in all the preceding centuries combined.

That couldn't happen in our country, beloved it already is:

We have simply proclaiming what the bible says about Marriage and Sexual sin declared a hate crime.

We are told that children have to be protected from the ten commandments

Movies with a Christian religious message automatically get a PG or in some cases a PG-13 because it's dangerous to expose children to Christianity. But on the other hand, you can pack a kids movie full with Potty Humor, Eastern Mysticism, Environmentalism, Historical Revisionism and Anti-Western dogma like the Lion King, Monsters Incorporated, or Pocohontas and still get a "G."

Pace High School in Pensacola, Principal Frank Lay and Athletic Director Robert Freeman. Saying Grace at a dinner?

Rifqa Bary Case – Honor Killings - there we see liberals, who in many cases are militantly atheistic themselves, siding with radical Muslims.

Why? Well brothers and sister the Herodians, Saducees, Pharisees, and Romans hated each other, they agreed about hardly anything, but yet they could all work together against Christ.

Brothers and Sisters, we often ask why are so many leaving the faith today. Well we've made out that Christianity, should be easy, We make it too easy for our kids, we make it play time, and so when it

becomes HARD to be a believer in College, they crack. We raise children, whom we hope would be willing to lay down their lives for their country, or die to defend their family, and we aren't doing as good a job there as we used to, but are really doing ANYTHING to raise children who would be willing to DIE for their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ?

2) Follow this methodology of Christ's when you witness!: Don't you ever tell 'em it will be easy. Don't tell 'em people will like them more, or that a life of cross-bearing is easy.

“To count the cost is one of the first duties that ought to be pressed on Christians in every age. It is no kindness to young beginners to paint the service of Christ in false colors, and to keep back from them the old truth, "Through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom of God." By prophesying smooth things, and crying "Peace," we may easily fill the ranks of Christ's army with professing soldiers. But they are just the soldiers, who, like the stony-ground hearers, in time of tribulation will fall away, and turn back in the day of battle.” – JC Ryle

If I can give you some advice, invite people to come to our church, but don't say come on you'll have a great time. Try this, "I'd like to invite you to my church, but I'm not sure you're tough enough for it" Forget persecution, a lot of people aren't even able to take Christianity this difficult. So often like a Christian with a pliable will, we just tell them the good things, and when they fall into the slough of despond they are off like a shot.

3) I know this will be difficult but, how do you know that, you love someone or something, is it because you mention them in your info facebook? Send them flowers? Remember their birthday? No, brothers the sign that you really love something or someone is if you are willing to die for it. Are YOU willing to die for Christ? Because when persecution comes it is the means by which the true and false believers are separated.

“Persecution acts like a great winnowing-fan that drives the chaff away from the floor on which the pure grain is housed; it is to the Church like a refiner's fire. The mere dross is separated. The faithless, who are among the faithful found, soon apostatize, while the sterling gold and silver, the genuine lovers of Christ are purged and purified by the ordeal through which they are constrained to pass.”

Now remember this we are willing to die for Him, because HE FIRST DIED FOR US!

Romans 5:6 For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die.

8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.

4) You will at some point probably fail Christ, you'll do something that denies him in the world, people will be making fun of something or someone Christian and you won't speak in their defense, a group of people will be endorsing something, like same-sex marriage, and you won't speak against it, someone will imply that every good person goes to heaven, and at that moment you won't step up and boldly quote John 14:6., you'll join an unbeliever, or unbelievers in some sin, or something worse.

And you will feel horrible in that moment. You will have wounded your conscience. Now at that moment in time, the Devil is going to want you to despair. He is going to want you to think, that's it, I've blown it now, I can't ever go back. He wants you to think and feel just like JUDAS did after betraying Christ, and you know what Judas did – he hanged himself. But in that moment, don't follow the example of Judas, follow the example of PETER.

Peter betrayed Christ as well. At a critical moment he didn't want to suffer for the faith and his betrayal cut him to the core, he wept, but Jesus was willing, ready, and able to restore Him, and He made of Peter a mighty instrument who was ready at the end to seal his testimony with his life.