

John 15.18-16.15 / COB / 02.22.15

Introduction

- † **[Slide 1: Hindu attack]** Let's suppose next year the state government passes a law that churches must agree to marry any two people who come in the door or lose all their tax exemptions.
- Some churches close or go underground to meet secretly in homes. Others agree with the law. We decide to stand firm for our beliefs; I give up my salary, so we can keep the building and pay our property, income, and sales taxes. You think this could happen?
 - There is popular support for the law locally. Some churches preach that Christ would want us to be tolerant and accepting, that the law is good. The borough holds a rally in favor of the law, to support the right to marriage without discrimination.
 - Because our stance on the law is unpopular, I start to find broken windows and graffiti when I come to work. One evening, your neighbors come banging on your door and demand that you come out and face them over this issue. They are shouting that you are hateful and prejudiced; they set fire to a cross in your yard; they threaten you and your family. Could this really happen? My friends, it already is happening all around the world over various issues.
 - It could happen here. A simple law which we resist, a declaration that speaking for Christian values is a hate crime against those who live differently, a social movement for tolerance and acceptance of deviance; we have that already! We easily could face all this in the next year.
 - Would the talk of tolerance and acceptance weaken your resolve? Would threats weaken your resistance? Or would violence against you and yours lead you down the path to your own violent sin? Would you change your beliefs or your obedience or your witness for Christ, if you faced the kind of persecution the church has always faced somewhere in the world?
- † You can turn in your Bible to John 15.18. We have been studying what Jesus taught to eleven of his closest followers on the last night of his life. Today we will see that he wanted to prepare them, and us, for hostility from the unbelieving world which comes because of our association with him. Let's pray and then see what he has for us today.

[Slide 2: 15.18-21] John 15.18-21 NET: [Jesus speaking] **"If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. However, because you do not belong to the world, but I chose you out of the world, for this reason the world hates you. Remember what I told you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they obeyed my word, they will obey yours too. But they will do all these things [evil things] to you on account of my name, because they do not know the one who sent me."**

- † Does the unbelieving world hate Jesus? In some sense, this is literally true, isn't it?
- Adherents of other religions hate Jesus, because he exposes their beliefs as false. Hindus, Moslems, Animists are killing Christians in areas they control. Where false Christianities dominate, evangelicals face persecution through legal and social pressure.
 - In our country, atheists and secular humanists hate the claim of Christ that he is the exclusive way to righteousness, the exclusive way to God the Father and salvation. They demand we be tolerant of any opposing view, though they have little tolerance for our view.

- They want us to accept abortion on demand, homosexual marriage, and the teaching that all religions are equal, yet at the same time they want to take away our right to have a Bible club in the school, to pray in public places, and to voice our biblical, moral, views. So, yes, I think it is fair to say that sometimes the world literally hates Jesus.
- † In another sense, Jesus uses love and hate as extreme options to clarify the choice we have to make.
- Some people, even church people, while not expressing outright hostility to Jesus, do pursue a lifestyle which excludes depending on him or submitting to him, and they think nothing of going against his moral code regarding lust, drugs, materialism, selfishness, seeking their own glory.
 - They hate Jesus in that they have no use for him or what is his, and so they follow the ways of the fallen world instead; and thus they inadvertently promote Satan’s agenda instead of Christ’s.
- † Why this hate from the world? Look down at 16.11: Jesus refers to Satan as the ruler of this world.
- Mankind entered sin by turning away from obeying and depending on God. The results were separation from God, corruption of our nature, a curse on the world, and Satan seizing control. Human society is consumed by spiritual darkness, led by Satan down the path away from God.
 - We have learned that Jesus is spiritual light, showing the way to God, salvation, righteousness, but sinful, fleshly, people love the darkness of sin, so they hate or at least turn away from Jesus.
- † As he speaks, Jesus knows the religious leaders are coming to arrest him, beat him, falsely convict him in court, and kill him. If they hate him that much, they will hate his followers too.
- People who responded in faith to the teachings of Jesus would now follow the teachings of his apostles, but those who rejected or persecuted Jesus would reject and persecute believers too.
 - When Christians do a lousy job of following Christ – when we take the bottom line worldly path – then we look no different from the unbelieving world, and then we find acceptance. Isn’t this true? When I was living with my girlfriend, living for money and other desires, living out my pride and selfishness, I fit right in with my neighbors and coworkers.
 - But when we stand out, when we live morally, we stand up for truth and righteousness, we defend Christ’s ethics and share the gospel openly, then we also can expect rejection and disrespect, even hostility, social pressure, and outright antagonism, because we follow Jesus.
- † Even though our alignment with Jesus is what attracts the hate of the world, Jesus offers an encouraging thought: Look at v.19: he said to the apostles, “I chose you out of the world.”
- We could translate the Greek verb, “I chose you out of the world *for myself*.” Jesus loved the apostles, and he loves us, so much that he chose to take us out of our place in sinful society, to belong to him instead, to be his people who would reflect God’s character and represent God in the midst of society. No more lust or extra-marital sex, no more living for materialism, luxury, and leisure, no more pride and selfishness; instead, we seek to reflect Christ’s purity, righteousness, humility, and selflessness, and we pursue glorifying God and helping others.
 - We might be persecuted, even killed, for Christ, but that will be because we belong to him, because he chose to save us and sanctify us for himself. Do you value what the top line with Christ offers so that you would rather belong to Christ but be hated, ostracized, persecuted, maybe even killed? Or would you rather belong to the world and be safe and accepted?

- You might not think you have to make that choice, but you do; God will bring you to that choice, he will prune you with it. You better make the decision now, because the crisis, the test of faith, the hurricane, is coming.

[Slide 3: 15.22-25] John 15.22-25: [Jesus speaking] **“If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. But they no longer have any excuse for their sin. The one who hates me hates my Father too. If I had not performed among them the miraculous deeds that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen the deeds and have hated both me and my Father. Now this happened to fulfill the word that is written in their law, ‘They hated me without reason.’”**

† Jesus says if he had not come, if he had not spoken the truth, if he had not done miraculous signs which revealed his identity through the prophecies of the Jewish scriptures, then people would not have sin or would not be guilty of sin.

- To understand what Jesus means, we have to look at the literary context, like Mark has been teaching in the development class. Jesus is talking about people rejecting him as the Messiah-savior from God the Father. Before Jesus came, people might have tried the excuse that the gospel was vague, but now that he had come, proven his identity, and spoken the truth about the way to salvation, there was, there is, no excuse.
- Jesus is not saying people were sinless before he came. He is saying that in their sinfulness, in their love for sin, they rejected him, his message, and his miracles, and so proved their hate for Jesus and for God the Father. They are now guilty of rejecting God’s offer of a life raft, of salvation from sin, and so now they will be condemned to eternal spiritual death.
- Those who loved God the Father did recognize Jesus as the one whom God had sent, and thus came to saving faith; those who hated God rejected his Messiah. Most people today also will reject Christ and his offer of salvation, because they are mired in faithless spiritual death. Only if Christ chooses them out of this worldly darkness will they be able to see his light. While in darkness, they hate Jesus without cause or reason.

† This fulfills a prophecy from Psalms in the Jewish scriptures [35.19; 69.4]. Usually the term “the law” meant the books of Moses, Genesis through Deuteronomy. But sometimes, like here, this term could refer to all the Jewish scriptures.

- David wrote these psalms about his own life roughly a thousand years earlier. But Jewish prophecy taught the Messiah-savior would also be God’s ultimate king, descended from David, heir to his throne. So God put prophecy about the Messiah into the life and writings of David.
- David, as God’s chosen king, was hated and persecuted for no good reason, simply because he was God’s chosen and aligned with God; much more would be the Messiah who would be the ultimate representative of God the Father on earth, not only in his day, but for all time.
- Jesus noted that this persecution, this hatred, is predicted in “*their* law.” Jesus was a Jew, he was talking to eleven other Jews, and he was referring to persecution by still other Jews. In his day, the issue was Jews hating the Jewish Messiah and hating fellow Jews who followed that Messiah. Jesus points out that their hate was predicted in *their* scriptures.

[Slide 4: 15.26-27] John 15.26-27: [Jesus speaking] **“When the Advocate comes, whom I will send you from the Father— the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father— he will testify about me, and you also will testify, because you have been with me from the beginning.”**

- † Who is this “Advocate?” The Holy Spirit. There is no perfect translation of the Greek word John used here [παράκλητος], so English Bibles use “Advocate,” “Helper,” “Comforter,” or “Counselor,” which are partial meanings of the Greek term. We might say, the “Helper who will empower you.”
- Earlier in this conversation, Jesus told the apostles that when he ascended back to Heaven, he would have God the Father send the Holy Spirit to indwell and empower believers, and to help the apostles to remember what Christ had taught them so they could write the New Testament and teach the church correct doctrine about Christ and salvation.
 - Now Jesus says that the Spirit will testify about him. He partly means this empowerment, but the Spirit also will testify to the unbelieving world, as we will see.
- † **[Slide 5: testify]** Jesus says that the apostles also must testify. Most English translations say the apostles “will testify” about Christ, but the Greek definitely is not future tense. It could be a present indicative, “you testify” or “you are testifying”; but more likely it is a command: “you *must* testify.”
- Jesus told them, the Spirit “will testify concerning me. And you also *must* testify, because you are with me from the beginning.” “Apostle” [ἀπόστολος] means “messenger”: Jesus chose these apostles to be with him from the start of his ministry, so they would have an eye witness account of all he taught and did, so they would have a conviction that what the Spirit reminded them about Christ was true, and so they would be credible witnesses to others about Christ.
 - They must now go and testify about him, through their teaching, their lifestyle, and the writing of the New Testament. It is because of this testimony, that they will attract hostility and persecution in the world which rejects the truth about Christ.
 - None of us are apostles. But we are indwelt and empowered by the Holy Spirit, and we are enlightened by the Spirit, the writings of the apostles in the New Testament, our salvation experience, and our progressive transformation to being more like Christ and less like the unbelieving world, so we too must testify to what we know about Christ, and thus we too can expect to attract hostility from the unbelieving world.
- † This is a difficult passage to preach. I don’t want to weaken the solemnity of what Jesus is saying with witty anecdotes or humor. I cannot make light of it or skip it when Jesus says it is so important. But let me break things up a little by telling you a story. It has two parts. Here is the first.
- In one bank where I worked, there were three ladies who said they were Christians, but were involved in the occult. When I tried to talk with them about it, a firestorm ensued. One by one, people complained about me to their bosses, which cost me a promotion; I was told I could not have a Bible on my desk or a cross in my office; someone began stealing my stuff from my office; some coworkers stopped talking to me but continued talking bad about me to anyone who would listen; and a top executive of the bank put on the teller line a wizard statue with a magic 8-ball like device in it, so our customers could check their fortunes.
 - I did not face violence and death, but there was persecution designed to make me miserable and hurt my career. The next few verses help prepare the apostles and us for this problem.

[Slide 6: 16.1-6] John 16.1-6: [Jesus speaking] **“I have told you all these things so that you will not fall away. They will put you out of the synagogue, yet a time is coming when the one who kills you will think he is offering service to God. They will do these things because they have not known the Father or me. But I have told you these things so that when their time comes, you will remember that I told**

you about them. I did not tell you these things from the beginning because I was with you. But now I am going to the one who sent me, and not one of you is asking me, ‘Where are you going?’ Instead your hearts are filled with sadness because I have said these things to you.”

- † Up to now, Jesus had protected them from people’s hate and persecution, but his death would be the end of that, so now he had to teach and prepare his followers.
 - In 16.1, Jesus used the verb σκανδαλίζω: he did not want the apostles to “fall away” into sin and doubt. He is telling them these truths to strengthen them, so that when the persecution comes, they will remain strong in faith and obedience, on the top line.
 - The apostles were hoping Jesus was about to set up his kingdom, to deliver Israel from Roman occupation and bring peace and justice to the world. Instead, he is talking about dying and leaving them, so they already are confused, frightened, and doubtful.
 - When he dies and ascends to Heaven, they will be on their own and more susceptible to confusion, fear, and doubt. This is why Jesus would send the Holy Spirit to them and why he was forewarning them here, so they would know that what they faced was anticipated by the Father and the Son, and that the Spirit would either empower them to endure through all of it or would deliver them into their place in God’s house in Heaven.
 - They might fear death and suffering [or at least miserable work conditions in a bank], but Jesus knew the real danger was apostasy, falling away, turning away from God and his Messiah in fear and doubt when the world is against you and your life is falling apart.
 - I think it unlikely – without some affliction of mental illness – that any true believer would stop believing. But it is easy to drift away from God into the ways of the world, to seek comfort in worldly solutions and pleasures, to give up the fight and content ourselves with television and junk food. We face these risks today, but if our faith is true and we know the truth, if we stay in the light, then we can trust the Spirit to see us through the problems we face or allow us also to be martyrs for the gospel, bringing us great honor as we die for Christ.

- † The non-believing Jews would throw the apostles and other followers of Christ out of the synagogues, the Jewish churches. And – because they hated Christ and thought he was a false teacher – these people would think that killing Christians was an act of service to God. We see this threat come true in Acts: non-believing Jews were persecuting and even killing Christian Jews.
 - Today, all ethnic Jews face widespread persecution, often to the point of death. But that has not meant an easier time for Jewish or Gentile followers of Christ. The fight against us sometimes is more subtle than it was back then, but sometimes not: in areas controlled by radical Muslims or radical Hindus, Christians are killed every day for their faith.

- † But again we find hope. This will be “their hour,” when persecutors rise up against believers, but this also was “his hour” of crucifixion and resurrection, which provide deliverance for the faithful.
 - So the times will look bad to us and look bad for us. The world has gone awry and increasingly we can perceive that, especially with better dissemination of world news, so that we hear of all the atrocities and disasters from around the world every day.
 - But our hope is found in Christ. All the hate and persecution and evil is rising up against and because of him, but we know that he has found victory and has delivered us out of sin, death,

and evil, into God's family and salvation, and we know the Holy Spirit will deliver us through our dangers in life or deliver us through physical death into Christ's presence in Heaven.

- So we should be able to rejoice and hope despite the world's hate. The apostles found this difficult. They had asked where Jesus was going, but now they were silent because grief had filled their hearts. Let us not despair as they did, but instead find reason to hope and rejoice!
- † Suppose it does get bad here. Colby, Josh, and Becky get roughed up in school; Andrew, Mark, and Jim lose their jobs; while they are out, someone burns down the Stolfus house; the Ameys come home to find their goats dead... will you despair, or will you still have hope and reason to rejoice? It's a real question, one you better decide on before the worst comes.
- In the bank I mentioned earlier, three of my coworkers – including two who said they were Christian – seemed so driven by evil that I figured all I could do for them was pray. But before I left that bank, God allowed me to repair relationships with almost everyone else. And when I left, I was able to explain that God was leading me into part-time ministry, and I was able to leave gracefully, making time to train my replacement and working for the bank as a consultant.
 - And then there was the wizard. I don't want to reveal my sources, but someone – without hurting the wizard – took him, hid him somewhere in the bank, and sent a ransom note demanding that the wizard go home never to come back, lest he meet with a just judgment. The evil bank executive so cherished her wizard that she actually agreed to these terms, and thus was removed one small source of evil from the bank.
 - I was sad about what happened to me there, but God made it an opportunity for me, an opportunity for me to grow, an opportunity for me to see his intervening and sustaining power, an opportunity for me to witness for him under duress, and even an opportunity for me to make twice as much per hour as their consultant than I had made as their employee. So, an application step: cling to God, stay on the top line with him, when the hard times come.

[Slide 7: 16.7-11] John 16.7-11: [Jesus speaking] “But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I am going away. For if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you, but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong concerning sin and righteousness and judgment— concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.”

- † Jesus had to die and rise from the grave to usher in the New Covenant promises of Spirit indwelling and empowerment. Thus Christ's departure would ultimately be a blessing for believers.
- † English translations differ on how they translate the verb ἐλέγχω in 16.8. This verb can mean expose, legally convict, convince, reprove, or punish. Based on the context, word usage, sentence structure, and theological considerations, I think the Holy Spirit is reproofing, or rebuking, the world.
- He rebukes the world concerning sin, because people do not believe in Jesus, and thus they turn away from God into spiritual darkness and reject his offer of salvation and cleansing from sin.
 - He rebukes the world concerning righteousness, because Christ's sacrifice, resurrection, and ascension prove his absolute righteousness, which people reject and from which they deviate.

- He rebukes the world concerning justice or judgment, because people follow the world's ruler, Satan, who killed Christ and whom God has condemned through Christ's victory in crucifixion and resurrection.
- All three rebukes relate to Christ and each other. The worst sin is to reject the Savior, because he is the only way to reconcile with God, to find forgiveness and deliverance from the power of sin and evil. Because the unbelieving world turns away from Christ, the Spirit rebukes it.

[Slide 8: 16.12-15] John 16.12-15: [Jesus speaking] **"I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. For he will not speak on his own authority, but will speak whatever he hears, and will tell you what is to come. He will glorify me, because he will receive from me what is mine and will tell it to you. Everything that the Father has is mine; that is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what is mine and will tell it to you."**

- † There is more the apostles need to know if they are to carry out their mission for Christ, but Jesus has given them what they can bear to hear on this night.
 - The Holy Spirit would come to the apostles after Christ ascended to Heaven, and would teach the apostles what they needed to know about Christ in order to set up the church with correct doctrine and write the New Testament of the Bible.
 - The Spirit would guide them into the whole truth or all truth, revealing to the apostles all that is of Christ, even insights into God's future plans for Christ's return, judgment, and kingdom.

Conclusion

- † **[Slide 9: take away]** In this passage, Jesus gave us a theological sermon. Here four things I hope you will take away from this.
 - First, because Christ chose you to be his own, you need to expect antagonism and persecution from those who are in spiritual darkness. Expect it and prepare yourself for it. Last week, we talked about putting on the armor of God to defend against the attacks of spiritual enemies; the armor can help you with attacks by human enemies as well.
 - Second, when that trouble comes, don't falter; stand firm in faith and obedience. This is the same exhortation we had last week for spiritual enemies: no matter who is attacking you, don't falter, stand firm, stay on the top line with God.
 - Third, when that trouble comes, continue to testify for Christ with your lifestyle and words, even though your association with Christ is the cause for the trouble.
 - Fourth, even amidst such troubles, rejoice in hope as you remember that all of this is part of God's plan, foreseen by him and foretold in the scriptures, and as you remember the Holy Spirit either will empower you to endure or will take you home to be with God in Heaven.
 - You can rejoice in hope because you know suffering here – whether it be persecution, physical or mental illness, or something else – is temporary. And because Christ chose you for himself, you have eternal life and a reserved place in God's house as his adopted child. So you will go to Heaven when you die and be resurrected to the renewed Earth when Christ returns to reign.
 - Let's pray...