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September 14th, 2025

John 15:18 - 16:4

The World Will Hate You

The week before last, Ashley and I had the privilege to get to host a missionary in our home. She is on a furlough in the states for a few months, and came to visit us here in Plattsburgh for a couple days during her very full travel schedule. She is a missionary to a country in Africa that is Muslim, both culturally and politically. It's illegal to be a Christian there; it's a dangerous place, where she isn't even aware of a church because there are so few Christians, and the few Christians that are there are so scared to gather together, out of fear of persecution, such as imprisonment or even death. In fact, some of the Christians she knows and has disciples have been arrested before and are under watchful eyes. It's a sobering reminder of how much we have to be grateful for. But it's also a sobering reminder of just how real the threat of hostility from the unbelieving world is. Because persecution and hostility to Christ is not rare and unique; it's not limited to that country in Africa; it's not limited even to just Muslim dominated areas or third-world countries. I have friends who were arrested, threatened, and kicked out of "secular" countries in Asia. And there's persecution and hostility to the gospel in the West, too - increasingly so. Not too long ago, a man was arrested in the U.K. for praying silently in his head outside of an abortion clinic.¹ In our own country, we've seen increasing rates of cultural hostility and even legal persecution against Christians, Christian values, beliefs, and practices.

Sometimes, we think of persecution and hostility to the gospel as something that only happens in other places, and that it could never happen here. Or we think that it only counts as persecution if it includes physical violence or imprisonment. But in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus included harsh words and being slandered because of Him as legitimate types of persecution. I think it's important that we recognize that there's a broader spectrum of persecution and hostility towards Christianity, and that such persecution is present and increasing in our own country, because if we don't then we will not expect it to come, might not recognize it when we see it, and might not be *prepared* for it when it comes. And it will come, because Jesus warns us, right here in this passage, that persecution and hatred from the world is inevitable for all who follow Christ. Jesus tells us here that if we follow Him, then the world will hate us,

¹ <https://adflegal.org/article/uk-army-vet-appeals-conviction-for-praying-silently-near-abortion-facility/>

because it hates Him; but He also promises that the Holy Spirit will help us endure faithfully to Christ despite hatred from the world; and finally, he encourages us not to fall away during persecution, but to cling to His Word and persevere in faith.

First, we see the inevitability of hatred and persecution towards believers...

I. If you follow Christ, the world will hate you because it hated Christ (15:18-25)

If we believe in Jesus, follow Jesus, and live Christlike lives, then the world will hate and reject us, because the world hated and rejected Jesus. The more we think, live, act, sound, and look like Jesus, the more we will be hated and rejected and even persecuted by the unbelieving world. It's inevitable and to be expected. That's what Jesus is soberly telling us here in vv.18-25, so that we will expect it and not be surprised or dismayed when it happens. Jesus says this plainly and clearly in vv.18-19: "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. 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." The World will respond to us based on our relationship to Christ. The world hated and rejected Jesus, even to the point of unjustly trying, condemning, and executing Him on the cross. This refers to both the unbelieving Jews and Gentiles of His day. "The World" refers to the unbelieving peoples of this world, both as individuals and as groups, cultures, and societies. It refers to those who are of the Kingdom of this world, the Kingdom of Satan, not the Kingdom of God; those who are outside of Christ, who don't know God, and are still spiritually dead in their sins. That's just as true and present a reality today as it was back then. The World *still* hates Christ. And that means the World still hates those who follow Christ. Sometimes it's easier to see than at other times. It certainly waxes and wanes throughout history and around the globe today. Due to the spread and influence of Christianity throughout the world, there are thankfully times and places where we can see less of the world's influence and more appreciation for Christ, or even toleration; but when the influence of Christianity and the gospel fades, the influence of the world increases - and so does its hatred towards Christ, Christ's teachings, and Christ's people - Christians, us.

If we are of the world, the world will love us; if we are of Christ and called to Him out of the world, it will hate us. If the world hates Jesus, it'll hate us too. V.19 tells us that if the world *doesn't* hate us, but loves us, then that's not a good thing; if the world loves you, it means you're of the world. The world loves it's own but rejects and hates those who are not of the world but are of Christ. The more we look like the world, the more the world will love us. But the more we

look like Christ, the more the world will hate us. People will react to us the same way they react to Jesus. If they reject Him, they'll reject us, too. As v.20 reminds us, "A servant is not greater than his master." If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you." if Jesus was persecuted and hated by the world, then we will be persecuted and hated by the world, too, if we keep His Word and become more like Him Now, the flipside is also true, according to the end of v.19: if people receive Christ's Word, they will receive us, too! This is an encouraging reminder that the Church will love and receive us if we are in Christ, and also a reminder that out there in the world, there are some who are currently "of the world" but will leave the world and follow Christ as they hear the gospel, repent, and believe - just like happened to us, when Christ called us out of the world and out of sin to repent, believe, and follow Him. This should encourage us! But we shouldn't be surprised when the opposite happens, too.

Hostility and hatred from the world is inevitable. It comes in different forms and to different degrees. Thanks be to God, this does not mean that every Christian will face the worst kinds of hatred, hostility, and persecution. There are lighter forms and heavier forms of persecution - ranging from angry and harsh words, to mockery or slander, to losing friends or your job, to getting a fine or imprisonment, to being physically assaulted or even killed. We pray that we can be spared from harsher forms of persecution, and praise God when we see less of it due to the influence of His gospel and grace. But hatred and hostility are inevitable and promised, to at least some degree, so long as we live in the world but not of the world. It's expected.

But why is this the case? Why does the world hate Christ and Christians? Jesus gives us three reasons in vv.21-25. First, (vv.21, 23) The world hates Christians because they don't know God. We see this in v.21: "But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me." And again in v.23: "Whoever hates me hates my Father also." They are unbelieving and without Christ, and that means that they are anti-God; and if they are anti-Christ, they will be anti-Christian, anti-Christ's teachings, anti-biblical beliefs, values, and commands. Since they do not know God, they will be completely repulsed by godly living, godly values, and godly speech. The more we faithfully follow Christ, proclaim Him, look and live like Him, the more the world will hate us.

Secondly, (vv. 22, 24) the world hates Christ and Christianity because they don't like feeling guilty for their sins. We see this in verses 22 and 24: "If I had not come and spoke to

them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin... 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 is obviously not saying here that they were not guilty of sin in the eyes and judgment of God before Christ came. No, we see all throughout the Old Testament that the entire world is sinful and deserves God’s wrath and judgment, even unbelieving Israel. There is a day of Final Judgment coming, and all who do not repent and believe in Christ will face eternal judgment in Hell. Instead, what He means is that He incurs a *feeling of guilt*. Christ testifies that the world’s actions, beliefs, values, and lifestyles are sinful and evil, and will one day require a reckoning at the final judgment of the Lord. People don’t like this message and are offended by it. This is essential to a right proclamation of the gospel; there is no gospel of salvation apart from Christ bearing the wrath of God *against our sins* that we so rightly deserve; yet to believe and proclaim this, along with the call to repent and follow Christ, is inherently offensive, infuriating, and convicting to the World. They will not like it, but we must proclaim it; therefore, they will hate all faithful, gospel-believing and gospel-proclaiming Christians; if we proclaim Christ, the world will hate us.

And thirdly, Jesus tells us that the world hates and persecutes Christ and Christians in order to fulfill scripture. We see this in v.25: “But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: ‘They hated me without cause.’” Jesus is quoting Psalm 69:4, and possibly 35:19 as well. In both these psalms, King David, as a Messianic type and shadow pointing forward to the Messiah, Jesus, writes about the unjust hatred he faces from the enemies surrounding him. Christ fulfills this theme and pattern: it shows us that the Messiah would suffer unjustly at the hands of the world. And if King David, and His greater Son, King Jesus, suffered such a fate from the world, why would we expect it to be any different for us when we follow in Jesus’s footsteps? When it happens, it is simply the fulfillment of Scripture and God’s good plan. But we should be encouraged by this: even the world’s hate, rejection, and persecution can only serve to fulfill God’s good, perfect plans of redemption for His people.

So Jesus’s words here are clear: if we receive Christ’s call to leave the world and follow Him in faith, then the world will hate us. Hatred and persecution from the world are inevitable. It looks different and takes different forms, but we should expect it, in at least some sense, and we should not expect it to be easy. Because we are so tempted to want the world to love us - or at least like or tolerate us, aren’t we? I’ll just speak for myself for a moment: *I struggle with this at*

times. I don't like it when the world hates me. I like to be liked. At a bare minimum, I appreciated being tolerated, or at least not receiving negative attention or hostility. I don't like to be made fun of, mocked, or slandered. I don't like being criticized unfairly or wrongly; I don't like being slandered, mocked, lied about, or ridiculed. I don't like being yelled at or condescended to. And I'm assuming you don't either. We enjoy getting praise, compliments, and encouragement, but a lot of us would prefer no word at all rather than receive a harsh or hostile word. And so we naturally flinch back from the idea of the world hating us: we don't want that. We want the world to like us, or at least tolerate us. We don't want to have a target on our back every time we go out in public, so we're tempted to turn on the "Christian cloaking device" and just *blend in*.

When I first moved here, 5 years ago, I went to get a haircut; and of course, when you get a haircut at a new place, that basically means you pay a stranger to play 20 Questions with you and ask everything about your life. So it quickly came up that I had just moved here from the south to come and pastor a Baptist church. And then the game quickly switched from 20 Questions to her giving me 20 reasons why she thinks my job, being a pastor, and also Christians and churches in general, are bad for society. It was quite the welcome to the neighborhood. So the next time I went to get a haircut at a new place, guess what? I felt gun shy; I didn't want to go through that again. I started to feel tempted to just try and avoid talking about what I do for a living. But what's so bad about that is I was feeling tempted to avoid a great opportunity to talk about the gospel of Jesus Christ with unbelievers, all because I was afraid of what a stranger might think about me or say to me. I was tempted to turn the cloaking device on and blend in. I'll confess: I gave in to that temptation sometimes, and have had to repent and fight against it.

Maybe you struggle with that temptation, too: maybe you want it to love you, or maybe you just don't want it to hate you. Maybe you turn the Christian cloaking device to blend in with the world at times. Sometimes we do this with friends, classmates, co-workers, bosses, extended family. Sometimes strangers, like hairdressers or people we sit next to on airplanes. Maybe it looks like avoiding certain words or phrases or topics of conversation. At worst, we may develop a "Christian version of you" and a "worldly version of you" that you switch between based on who you're around; and that's incredibly dangerous. Sometimes we even see this from more famous or influential people who profess to be Christians - maybe even pastors or theologians of some sort - and yet go out of their way to try and make themselves more tolerable, winsome, and

attractive to the non-believing outside world. Like those who want to distance themselves from just normal, orthodox, conservative, biblical Christianity so that they don't fall into the crosshairs of what is considered acceptable by modern, progressive elites. Or those who compromise on clear biblical issues to appear more relevant or to not "cause offense" and turn people away. Or those who want to water down biblical values and convictions and make more room for disagreement because "the world is watching."

Yes, friends, the world *is* watching, and we must ask ourselves: are we going to present ourselves as those who look like the world wants us to, or as those who look more and more like Christ? Are we gonna be concerned with what the world thinks of us or what Christ thinks of us? We must choose Christ over the world, every time. We must choose the love of Christ over the world. But how do we stay faithful to Christ when enduring hatred and hostility? Thankfully, Christ doesn't leave us on our own but gives us the help we need through the Holy Spirit...

II. The Holy Spirit will help us faithfully bear witness to Christ in the world (15:26-28)

We see this in verses 26-27: "But when the Helper comes, who I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning." First, He promises the Helper will come - that is, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, sent by both the Father and the Son and proceeding from both God the Father and God the Son, as God the Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. We heard Jesus speak on the "Helper," or the "paraklete," a couple of weeks ago, from the second half of chapter 14. We'll see even more teaching about the work of the Spirit next week, in chapter 16. But here, we see that the Spirit of Truth comes to bear witness about the truth of Christ. In the end of verse 26, we see that the Spirit comes to bear witness about Christ in general. He bears witness about Christ to the world and to us, as he comes to dwell in our hearts. He reveals the truth of Christ to us, opens and illuminates binds, regenerates hearts, gives faith and understanding. He grants assurance to our souls, strengthening our faith, resolve, and conviction in Christ, even when trials and persecution comes, the going gets rough, and our faith is tested. This is a comforting assurance: though the world hates us, though we suffer persecution and hardships for His name, and may even be tempted to doubt and wonder whether or not it's all worth it, Christ sends the Holy Spirit into our hearts, the very Spirit of God, the Spirit of Truth, to bear witness about the truth of Christ to our very souls that yes, this is all true and that Christ is worth it.

But it doesn't stop there: the Spirit doesn't just bear witness *to us*, but also *through us*. As v.27 says, "And you also will bear witness." He speaks this first and foremost to His original disciples, who had been following Christ in His earthly ministry. He would send them out to bear witness to the gospel as His Apostles, and the Spirit would give them words to say even when they were dragged before Kings and on trial, as we see in the book of Acts. But this wasn't unique for the original band of disciples, but for *all* disciples of Christ - all Christians. Every Christian receives the Holy Spirit and is called and equipped *by* the Spirit to go forth and bear witness about Christ in the world. Given the context, Jesus is promising that the Holy Spirit will Help us be faithful to Him in the face of persecution from the world on account of Jesus's name. This includes both living a faithful life of following Jesus and becoming more like Him, with courage and conviction, even when it is difficult and costly and the world hates us for it. It also includes us verbal proclaiming the truth about Christ to the world, sharing the gospel and bearing witness to Jesus with others. It's difficult and intimidating to share the gospel at times, especially when we're worried about how people might respond, whether or not they will hate us or turn hostile in some way. We may worry we won't know what to say. But we don't need to worry; we just need to pray and trust that the Spirit, who has come to bear witness about Christ, will bear witness about Christ *through us*, strengthening us to be faithful and even giving us the words we need to say in such pivotal moments, and that He will strengthen us to faithfully persevere.

We need to remember this encouraging promise from Christ, claim it, pray for it, and act in faith upon it, because Christ has told us these things so that we won't fall away when such persecution comes, but lean on Him in faith. Which brings us to our final point...

III. Cling to Christ's Word in faith so that you don't fall away when persecution comes (16:1-4)

We see this in chapter 16:1-4, beginning in v.1, where Jesus says, "I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away." Jesus told us about the inevitable hatred of the world and the help of the Holy Spirit so that we will not be caught off guard, so that we won't be discouraged, in order to keep us from falling away. And this is really eye-opening we understanding what Jesus is saying here: he's saying that the greatest danger we face when confronting the hatred and hostility of the world is not the persecution itself, not suffering, not even death, but *apostasy*, deconstructing our faith, giving up in fear and falling away from

Christ.² That's the worst fate, the greatest danger, because if we leave Christ we lose everything. If we keep trusting in Christ, then who can stand against us? Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ; not even the sword. The worst they can do to us is kill us - and yet Christ has defeated death through His resurrection from the grave! If we cling to Christ in faith, if we are trusting and following Him, then death gives way to life and glory! We are more than conquerors in Christ Jesus. But if we fall away out of fear and choose the world over Christ, that is the truly greatest danger, because even if we gain the whole world, we lose our soul, lose Christ, and lose life. Trading away eternal life for a short-term gain in this world, only to end abruptly and give way to eternal damnation in Hell is a *terrible deal*.

Yet when persecution comes, Jesus knows that we will find ourselves questioning and tempted in our hearts at times. And because the world hates us when we faithfully follow Jesus, persecution *does* come, even from those who do so in the name of God, of truth, goodness, and justice. We see this in vv.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. And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me." Jesus warns them that the Jewish people, meant to be God's people, would reject Christ, and thus reject God - and therefore, would go on to reject and persecute God's true people, Christians. We see this happen throughout the book of Acts. They are indeed put out of synagogues, imprisoned, beaten, chased out of town, even killed at times, by those who claim to be doing God's will. But they must not give up or give in, but instead continue to remember Christ's Word and promises and cling to Him in faith, as Jesus says in v.4: "But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you."

We probably won't face persecution from Jews today, but we certainly do face hostility from those in the world who claim to hate and persecute us because they claim they are on the right side - on the right side of history, truth, justice, love, or even of God - by opposing Christ and His Word. As you follow Christ faithfully in your life, at work, at school, around friends and family, out in the public square, online, or even when minding your own business, there is an increasing likelihood that you will face hatred, hostility, and even persecution from the world around you. As you profess faith in Christ and strive to love Him by obeying His commandments

² D.A. Carson: "The greatest danger the disciples will confront from the opposition of the world is not death but apostasy." - D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, p.530.

in every area of life, people aren't going to like it. You'll be called a bigot. You'll be accused of spreading hatred, hate speech, and inciting violence just by trying to love people enough to speak the truth. You may get mocked, yelled at, or made fun of by friends or peers, classmates or co-workers. You may not get invited back to the dinner party or family reunion. You may get kicked out of organizations. You may get fired from work. You may get sued or fined. You may even go to prison, or even get violently attacked - or God-forbid, killed for your faith.

If all this sounds extreme, or you think that would never happen here, then let me lovingly encourage you to look up, look around, and pay attention to what's going on in the world today and *why* such things are happening, even in our own beloved country of America. Just this week, we had a very shocking, painful, brutal reminder that hatred of ideas sometimes leads to the world hating people enough to do wicked, evil things - even murder. This past week, as I'm sure you know, Charlie Kirk was assassinated while speaking at an event on a college campus. He was killed because of his ideas, because of his words and values. That included his conservative political views and values - but also his strong Christian faith and values and convictions. He was an outspoken believer in Jesus Christ and his faith played a big part in his speeches, views, and events. His Christian faith and witness was an undeniable part of what the world hated about him: including the man that wickedly took his life, and the wicked people in the world that justified the assassination. It was a painful remind that the world does indeed hate Christianity, and that hatred inevitably leads to wicked actions. Yet the world will not win. One of Charlie's last tweets, just days before his unjust murder, was this: Jesus defeated death so that you can live." That is the absolute truth that we must not forget.

When persecution comes and we're tempted to fall away, when we see others suffer unjustly for their faithfulness to Christ, when we fear hatred and hostility and are tempted to back off, blend in, keep our heads down, turn our cloaking device on, and choose the world instead of Christ, we must never forget the words and promises of Christ that we cling to. The reason it matters so much is because eternal salvation is on the line! The choice before us everyday is: are we going to choose the world or Christ? Heaven or Hell? Life or death? True life is not life in this world but in Christ: He is the resurrection and the life, and if we have Christ, we shall truly live, and the world can never take that from us.

So don't be afraid, Brothers and Sisters. Don't give up. Don't give in. Don't be discouraged. Don't be dismayed. Don't fall away. Be strong and courageous, for the Lord your

God is with you. He shall uphold you, strengthen you by His Holy Spirit to be faithful, and bring you home. We must persevere by remembering and clinging to Christ's Word with faith - we must remember and believe the Bible and hide God's Word in our hearts; we must cling to the gospel; we must remember God's promises; we must remember His love and sovereign grace and the hope of Heaven and that it will all be worth it! No matter what happens, no matter what comes our way, no matter how difficult things get, we must look to Christ and remember that He has already borne far worse than we have to, for our sake, that we can join Him in glory.

So let us boldly proclaim our hope and faith in Christ by taking the Lord's Supper together, where we visibly and tangibly proclaim that our hope is not in this world, but in the life to come, because of Jesus's life and death for us, that we may live. If you're a baptized believer in good standing with a gospel believing church, we invite you to come to the Table with us in just a moment.

But if you're not a believer this morning, there's a different way for you to respond. We invite you to turn away from the world, to leave it behind, and to receive Christ's call instead. Come to Him, for He alone can offer you what the world never can: true life, true security, true hope and salvation in glory, in the resurrection of the dead and a new perfect world to come! Repent from your sins, believe that Jesus died on the cross for your sins and the judgment you deserve, and commit your life to follow Him. Choose Christ over the world, for Christ shall overcome the world. Then, boldly make your faith public to all by being baptized. If you have any questions about this, we would love to speak with you after the service. Until then, let's have a moment of silence as we prepare to come to the Table.