

On Account of His Name

When we become Christians we are deeply moved by the enormous benefits that devolve upon us as believers, but we also experience the feeling of being scorned and marginalized by the cool crowd. You experience it in a thousand ways.

In today's text, Jesus taught his disciples about these things so that they would not fall. We desperately need these words today, for we often dream that we can follow Jesus and still be the darling on the social circuit or the hero in our professional groups.

John 15:18-16:4a

18 If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. **19** If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. **20** Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. **21** But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. **22** If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. **23** Whoever hates me hates my Father also. **24** If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. **25** But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: 'They hated me without a cause.' **26** "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. **27** And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.

1"I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. *2* They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. *3* And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. *4* But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you. *The Work of the Holy Spirit* "I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you.

There are two basic teachings here: the world hates believers, and Jesus helps believers.

I. The world hates believers (18-25)

A. The world's persecution of believers is inevitable (18-20)

1. Persecution is inevitable for the Christian. Follow Jesus' logic here:
 - a) The world hates Jesus; You belong to Jesus; You are in the world; The world hates you. So, if you're not being persecuted, you must ask yourself why not! (see II Tim. 3:12)
 - b) The writer of Hebrews says about those faithful saints who went before us:

35b Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life.

36 Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated- 38 of whom the world was not worthy-wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. (Hebrews 11:35-38)

As Amy Carmichael once put it, "Can he have followed far who knows no wound nor scar?"

We learned in the news recently:

- 40 Egyptian churches burned to the ground.
- House-church leaders were sentenced to Iran's infamous Evin Prison.
- 80 Christians were murdered in North Korea for merely owning a Bible.
- Believers were nailed to crosses in Syria.

And that's the news from just one month in 2014!

The late David B. Barrett and Todd M. Johnson, of the Center for Study of Global Christianity, reported that from AD 30 to 2000, 70 million Christians died as martyrs. Of those, there were 45 million Christian martyrs in the 20th century. There are between 287 and 288 martyrs per day: twelve per hour, or one every five minutes.

According to The Pew Research Center, over 75% of the world's population lives in areas with severe religious restrictions (and many of these people are Christians). Also, according to the United States Department of State, Christians in more than 60 countries face persecution from their governments or surrounding neighbors simply because of their belief in Jesus Christ.

We are going to be persecuted!

B. The Lord's judgment on persecutors is inescapable (21-25)

1. Jesus teaches us why our persecutors afflict us---they don't know God. What we also must realize is that when they persecute us, they are persecuting Jesus Christ personally. Consider Jesus' words to Saul on the road to Damascus. (see Acts 9:4, 5)
2. We weep for our persecutors because they will face massive judgment, not because we are any better human beings than they are, but because God has set His love on us as His dear children, and He ferociously defends us. Jihadi John was eventually destroyed by an American drone, but that was the least of his problems---he literally now must face the wrath of an angry Father whose children have been abused.

I. The Lord will help believers (15:26-16:4a)

Jesus then shows his disciples two key ways in which He will help us in our persecutions. His Spirit makes us witnesses (26, 27)

A. His Spirit makes us witnesses (26, 27)

We've not been sent here merely to survive, nor to despise those who are of this world. We are to be witnesses to them. We must speak up in a sensitive, respectful, and redemptive way. The "you" here is emphatic. (see Acts 1:8)

Ironically, oppression of the Church of Jesus has only made he grow more rapidly. Jesus' message of love and reconciliation thrives in a climate where hostility, danger, and martyrdom are present. Persecution and the spread of the gospel are inseparable.

2. What encourages you personally the most from this text?