



INTERPRETING THE SIGNS

READING JOHN'S GOSPEL

**SESSION 26:
HATED LIKE JESUS
JOHN 15:18-16:4**

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HATED LIKE JESUS

SESSION 26

SERMON DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. What are the forms of persecution we see in America?
2. What are the forms of persecution you face?
3. Does this persecution hinder you in your witness of Jesus?
How?
4. What can we do to strengthen our faithfulness to Jesus?

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

Being a follower of Jesus is not a calling for those of shallow commitment. If there is any other reason than love for Jesus and a belief in his words that motivate people to follow Jesus, it will surely fail in the long-haul of being a faithful witness to Jesus Christ. As we have seen in John's gospel, true commitment perseveres when the signs and wonders stop, when the miraculous provision of God vanishes, and when Jesus' words become hard for us to understand and affirm. As we will see in this passage, true commitment perseveres past the point of social discomfort to the point of death. While many of us will never face persecution to this level, thanks to the rule of law present in many Western countries, those preserved from this fate need to realize that the fear of social or cultural persecution is not something to simply disregard as trivial or powerless. Western culture has a profound power to bend the wills of people into conformity with the prevailing cultural notions. Western culture's suspicion of people truly committed to Jesus can easily cause disciples to shrink away from being a faithful witness because of their fear of man. Jesus' words are no less important to those under social and cultural persecution than those who follow Jesus under the threat of death.

STUDY THE SCRIPTURES

Read the Passage:

John 15:1-17

Think Through the Questions:

1. Why will disciples of Jesus face persecution?
2. Why did the world hate Jesus?
3. Who was "the world" to Jesus?
4. Why was it important for Jesus to tell his disciples these things?

Using the questions, summarize the teaching of the passage.

COMMENTARY

When studying the Bible, I often find that it is a challenge to keep the big picture of a particular text in mind as I study the smaller parts, and these chapters in John's gospel are some of the most challenging. I believe that it is probably because John continuously cycles through a few key ideas, like Jesus' relationship with the Father, while continuing to build on those ideas and show their connection to other things. You don't feel like you've ever really figured it out until you're done reading the book, and then it takes a rereading. Because of this, I find that I need to continually review and simplify as much as possible the progress to this point. Let's see if we can quickly and simply review John's gospel to this point so that we can better interpret the text at hand, which is John 15:18-16:4.

First, the primary intent of John's gospel is to cause readers to believe that the Messiah, the Savior of the world and the Son of God, is Jesus and that through that belief they would experience a truly joyful and abundant life. To do this, John describes seven signs that Jesus performed and how people responded to Jesus and the signs. There are two primary responses to Jesus' signs: unbelief and faith. Unbelief is the response of those who love their evil deeds and do not wish to cease doing those deeds or admit that they are evil. Ultimately, those who love their evil deeds believe that life is found apart from Jesus, even though he demonstrated that he is the Son of God and the originator of life. Those who respond to Jesus in faith are those who acknowledge that life is found in Jesus and that he alone possesses the words of eternal life, since he is the only one who has seen God and is the physical incarnation of God. As God is the creator of all life, to believe in Jesus is to believe in the source of life. Life with Jesus is life with God and is life eternal. Life without Jesus is no life, but is existence within the dark deceptions of Satan, which ultimately leads to death.

By the time the reader gets to chapter 13, he or she has been fully exposed to Jesus, his power, and his words. Most of those exposed to Jesus' life to this point didn't believe. Many were drawn to his miracles, but then walked away because of the difficulty of his words. Many did believe, but did not confess Jesus because they feared being ridiculed and ostracized by the Jews. Many believed and wanted Jesus to overthrow Rome and free Israel from Rome's power—failing to see their personal need for Jesus' cleaning from sin. Those who did believe

in Jesus' signs and words and wanted to follow him were Jesus' disciples. These men joined Jesus for supper the night before his trial and crucifixion. Jesus wanted to prepare them for what was to come. Readers of these chapters are privileged to those teachings and actions of Jesus that were originally intended for but a few people. Through these teachings, readers can learn what Jesus delivered to the disciples in order to prepare them for being followers of him. From these chapters, readers can learn Jesus' special instruction on living in the world as followers of him.

These instructions revolve around a few core ideas:

1. Jesus is leaving and going to the Father. This will usher in a new order governed by love and sacrifice rather than law.
2. Upon Jesus' departure, the Father and Jesus will send the Holy Spirit to comfort, teach, and empower the disciples in this new order of love—strengthening them to do the works of God, which will be greater than Jesus' own works because they will be performed under the new order of love, not law.
3. With the Holy Spirit, the disciples are able to experience joyfilled eternal life with the Father and Jesus now, if they continue to abide in Jesus. To abide in Jesus is to abide in his words (commandments and teachings), his love (the ongoing cleansing of the gospel), and to pray for the ongoing works of God in Jesus name.

Jesus is now ready to prepare his disciples for another aspect of following him and doing the works of God—facing persecution. This passage, John 15:18-16:4, addresses two aspects of the persecution, 1) why they will face persecution (15:18-27), and 2) the disciples' response to the persecution (16:1-4).

Persecution consists of any hostile word or deed towards Jesus or those that follow him. It can be as trivial as jokes or comments making fun of followers of Jesus or it could be as significant as murder. The disciples will face persecution for one primary reason—hatred of Jesus. The source of the persecution is the world. *World* is a term used by biblical authors to describe the entire order of the universe that is opposed and hostile to God. It is the created order that has been subjected to the deceptions of Satan and that lives in darkness and evil deeds. The disciples are not of this *world*, because Jesus has chosen them out of the *world*, and cleansed them with his words, which are true and life-giving.

Because the *world* has hated Jesus, it will hate the disciples, for they are not of the *world*, just as Jesus was not of the world.

However, not the entire *world* will remain in darkness. As the gospel of John describes people believing in Jesus during Jesus' ministry on earth, the disciples will also engage in God's works, which will result in others believing in Jesus. This is the fruit John described earlier in this chapter. Jesus is clear that the disciples will bear fruit—that some will indeed listen to the witness of the disciples.

The world persecuted Jesus because they did not know the Father. They did not know God. Jesus tried to reveal God to them through his signs and words, but they refused to listen to Jesus, and instead they harassed him and sought to kill him. Because Jesus' words pointed out their evil deeds and motivations, they hated him, and in hating him, they hated God, because Jesus came to earth on behalf of God and performed those signs and spoke those words that had been given to him by God. As a result, their direct opposition to Jesus' words and signs makes them guilty of intentional rejection of God, which will result in judgment.

Upon Jesus' departure, the witness of the words of Jesus will continue through the Holy Spirit and the disciples, which means that the world will continue to hate Jesus and the Father. In their hatred, they will persecute those who testify to Jesus. With Jesus gone, the hatred will be leveled against those who follow and testify to Jesus. Jesus tells his disciples these things for one reason—to keep them falling away from abiding in Jesus once the persecution starts. Jesus mentions two forms of persecution here—being forced from the synagogue, which was the center of social, cultural, and religious life for the Jews, and being killed. Jesus also wants them to be clear that those who will persecute them will do so in the name of God. Those who persecute them will do so with full belief that their murderous acts are in service to God. With Jesus telling them beforehand, the disciples will be able to more fully prepare themselves for what is to surely come.

THINK THROUGH THE ISSUES

Jesus is quite clear in his explanation of what will cause persecution. The ongoing witness of the gospel, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the testimony of Jesus disciples, will cause the world to hate those who follow Jesus. With that hatred will come persecution in some form. Fear of that persecution is what causes many disciples of Jesus to neglect being his witness. It could be fear of being rejected as a friend or family member. It could be fear of being ridiculed and mocked by peers or work associates. It could be fear of being considered “weird” or of being “one of those religious fanatics.”

Unfortunately, there are many people who call themselves followers of Jesus who are weird, overly fanatic, hypocritical, militant, arrogant, judgmental, or just plain rude. They preach the gospel, yell at people, murder doctors and homosexuals, sexually abuse children, completely pull out of culture, never have any fun, fear anything “un-Christian,” and generally want to have little to do with the world except to condemn it and pray for its final destruction. When the world hears the gospel of Jesus Christ from such as these, what are those of us to do that are true disciples of Jesus and want to testify to the gospel? How can we persevere in our witness, fully knowing what persecutions we may suffer legitimately or otherwise, and maintain our faithfulness to Jesus?

Issue: Persevering Through Persecution

1. Have you ever faced persecution as a Christian? If so, what was it?
2. Do you regularly testify to the work and words of Jesus Christ to those who are “in the world?” If so, what responses do you get? If you don’t, why not?
3. What forms of persecution do you find it most difficult to stand up to?
4. Describe how you think Jesus’ words to his disciples can help you become a more faithful disciple?
5. What do you think can set us apart from those who claim to be Christians, but whose actions and words are hypocritical?



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