

Life in His Name – Part 37
Costly Christianity - John 15:18 - 16:4a
Crosspoint – Dave Spooner – Nov. 26th, 2023

Intro:

- The final words and instructions we hear from our loved ones before they die stick with us differently than other memories. In some ways, these words were chosen as the most important thing they want to share with us, focus on, and do.
- I remember some of my dad's final words just before he died, almost 14 years ago, like it was yesterday. He told me to "spend and be spent for the glory of God," to "keep in the eye of the storm," and to "take care of the family." He then prayed his final prayer over me and my future. These words have been emblazoned upon the pages of my heart, and they have guided, guarded, and gifted my life.
- In a similar way, Jesus was communicating His concentrated final thoughts and instructions to those He loved, His closest of friends right before He died. May Jesus's words be emblazoned on the pages of our hearts as well. His words, His final instructions of eternal value and worth will guide us, and guard us, and gift our lives like no other words or instructions.
- Jesus continues to prepare His closest friends as to what is to come, who they are to be, and what they are to do, and then prays for them. Last week, we heard that we are to "abide in Him," and that "apart from Him, we can do nothing." Again, and again, and again, Jesus emphasized the utmost importance of loving each other and obeying Him because of love.
- Jesus knew that it wasn't all going to be "kumbaya" and campfires. He knew that we were going to face fierce opposition, persistent persecution, and that people would be killed on account of following Him. Christianity comes with a cost. In the midst of telling His disciples to "not let your hearts be troubled," He tells them and us some very troubling things so that they and we will know what to expect so our faith will not fail.
- The first thing Jesus tells us is to expect to be hated, and He gives the reasons why this will be the case.

Expect to be hated.

John 15:18 NIV

If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.

- You would think that Jesus would have been loved and received everywhere He went. After all, He was the "miracle worker," the "gentle healer," and the "demon slayer," among other things. He was not hated for these things. He was hated because of His testimony about Himself and His testimony about the world, "that its works are evil" (John 7:6).
- Kent Hughes, in his commentary on John, put it this way with an illustration:

Jesus' life, specifically through his word and his works, demonstrated by contrast how sinful the Jews were, and they hated him for that. His inner righteousness drew their abiding hostility because it revealed the shabbiness of their external goodness.

Once an African chief, in this case a woman, happened to visit a mission station. Hanging outside the missionary's cabin, on a tree, was a little mirror. The chief happened to look into the mirror and saw her reflection, with its hideous paint and evil features. She gazed at her own terrifying countenance and jumped back in horror

exclaiming, “Who is that horrible looking person inside that tree?” “Oh,” the missionary said, “it is not in the tree. The glass is reflecting your own face.” The African would not believe it until she held the mirror in her hand. She said, “I must have the glass. How much will you sell it for?” “Oh,” the missionary said, “I don’t want to sell it.” But she begged until he capitulated. She took the mirror. Exclaiming, “I will never have it making faces at me again,” she threw it down and broke it to pieces.

That is precisely what the Jews did with Jesus, and tragically it often happens today. We hate to see what we really are. A good look at Jesus results in either abiding hatred or love, and people have the same reaction toward Christ’s followers. (*Kent Hughes, Preaching the Word Commentary Series, John: That You May Believe, p. 373-374*)

- If the world hates you, know that it hated Jesus first because of His testimony about Himself, how He lived, and that in comparison to the righteousness of God, our works are evil. Know that if the world hates you because you are reflecting Jesus, you are in good company because it hated Jesus first. So, ultimately, the hatred toward you is hatred toward Christ.
- The second reason for the world’s hatred is this:

John 15:19 NIV

If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.

- This is tribalism. If you are a Christian, you have been chosen to play for a different team. You have joined “Team Jesus.” We know how this works with our sports teams. If you are a Bears fan, you instantly connect with other Bears fans because you measure success the same way, have the same values, you have the same “heroes,” share the same victories, and “hate” the same things, (namely the Packers). You instantly “love” other Bears fans because you are on the same “team.”
- When we follow Jesus, we are chosen out of the world and now “play for a different team.” We are now on Team Jesus, and we measure success differently than the world. We root for different things, and we have different values. Success is defined by giving your life away, not keeping it. We are to look like Christ in who we are and what we do, to have humility, not pride, to sacrifice, not dominate, etc. Christians are hated because we are not on the world’s “team.”
- By our nature, we have an affinity towards others like us, and we oppose those who are outside our “tribe.” Those who follow Christ have been called out of the world's team and, by default, are opposed by the world.
- “World” is defined as all those who do not follow Jesus as the Son of God. This is not merely “secular” people, but especially those who follow other religions.
- The third reason that the world will hate those who follow Jesus is because of our service to and association with Jesus. He is our Lord, and we aim to follow Him.

John 15:20 NIV

Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.

- Jesus was persecuted, and if we are following Jesus, then we will be persecuted as well. We are guilty by association. Don’t try to avoid persecution by distancing yourself from Jesus, and don’t think you are greater than Jesus, that you will not have to suffer in some way for your

faith. No servant is greater than his master. And we are servants of Christ, meaning that we live to do His will. We obey His teaching, and those who do so will be persecuted. What we teach is what He taught, and we are not to be surprised if not everyone receives and follows it.

- Paul and Peter talked about this truth time and time again in their letters to the churches. They wrote stuff like:

2 Tim 3:12-13 NIV

In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

Phil 1:29-30 NIV

For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him.

1 Thess 3:3-5 NIV

. . . so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. For you know quite well that we are destined for them. 4 In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know.

1 Peter 4:12-15 NIV

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. 14 If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

- The last reason Christians should expect to be hated is because of who Jesus is.

John 15:21-15 NIV

They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me. 22 If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin. 23 Whoever hates me hates my Father as well. 24 If I had not done among them the works no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. As it is, they have seen, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. 25 But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: ‘They hated me without reason.’

- If you are a Christian, this means that you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. You believe that Jesus is God and that His words are the words of God. You believe that what He says is true and must be understood, believed, and followed. Saying that Jesus is “the way, the truth and the life, and no one comes to the Father but through Him” (John 14:6) is a narrow way. It is exclusive. People will hate you for this position, and if they hate you, they hate Him, and if they hate Him, they hate the Father. So, if people say they love “God” but reject Jesus, they don’t know God (the Father) at all. They are guilty of their sin by rejecting the Son of God and His words and testimony.
- They hated Jesus without reason, just as people hated David without reason, (this quote is taken from Psalm 35:19 and Psalm 69:4). If David as a type of Christ was hated, how much more will people hate the true Christ without reason? He came to save people from the penalty and the power of their sin, and they hated Him for it. He did not come to harm people but to help them, but He has been hated for it. If this was the response of some to Christ, this will be the response of some to you.

- So, we are to expect to be hated because of these reasons. But we can also expect to be helped in the face of hatred.

Expect to be helped.

John 15:26-27

When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me. 27 And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.

- You and I, those who are Christians, followers of Christ, have been given help by the Holy Spirit, who is the Advocate, the one who supports us and defends us, the Spirit of Truth. The Holy Spirit bears testimony about Jesus—that Jesus is indeed the Son of God and that His words are the words of God. The Holy Spirit brings witness to this by confirming the truth of Jesus, illuminating, and confirming His words, and bringing conviction and power to change the heart. You and I have the great help of the Holy Spirit, and this is a great help indeed.
- We do not testify about Jesus on our own, but we have the testimony of the very Spirit of Christ and the Father Himself. And we must testify about Jesus. Your testimony comes from being with Him, what He has done in your life, what you have seen Him do, and what you have heard from His word.
- We can only talk about Jesus to the extent we have been with Him. So be with Him. Look for Him, talk with Him, listen to Him. And then tell people what He has done, what He has said, and how this has affected you and what it means for everyone. This is what we must do. This is what we have the honor of doing and can do so with honor.
- Jesus has one more thing to say to us in this passage. Not only are we to expect to be hated, and to expect to be helped, but we are also to expect to be harmed. Following Christ may even cost you your life.

Expect to be harmed.

John 16:1-4

All this I have told you so that you will not fall away. 2 They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God. 3 They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. 4 I have told you this, so that when their time comes you will remember that I warned you about them.

- Notice what Jesus did not say in this passage. He did not say, “I have told you these things, so you will not be harmed or killed.” But what He said was, “All this I have told you so that you will not fall away.” This means that Jesus was more concerned about our faith than our fate. Jesus was more concerned about their denial than He was about their death. D. A. Carson observed that “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,” *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* p. 530). Your faith and your faithfulness are more valuable than even your life here on earth, and the greatest danger is not death but falling away from Jesus.
- Jesus taught this to His disciples and to us. He said:

Luke 12:4-5 ESV

“I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. 5 But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!”

- Jesus warns us that these things will happen, and don't be surprised that they do, because they will. Instead of hanging on to your life as more valuable, hang on to Him as the highest value. Because if you lose your life for Him, you will gain your life for eternity. Our eternal destination is more important than our temporal condition.
- Our brothers and sisters in other countries face this as a contemporary reality.

Asian Access (or A2), a Christian mission agency in South Asia, listed a series of questions that some church planters have been asking new believers who are considering baptism. (Due to safety concerns, Asian Access does not mention the country's name.) The country is predominantly Hindu, but over the past few decades, Christianity has grown in popularity—especially among poor and tribal peoples. The following seven questions serve as a reality check for what new followers of Jesus might experience if they decide to "go public" with their decision to follow Christ:

- Are you willing to leave home and lose the blessing of your father?
- Are you willing to lose your job?
- Are you willing to go to the village and those who persecute you, forgive them, and share the love of Christ with them?
- Are you willing to give an offering to the Lord?
- Are you willing to be beaten rather than deny your faith?
- Are you willing to go to prison?
- Are you willing to die for Jesus?

The seven questions serve as a sobering reminder for all Christians from every continent of what it might cost us to follow Jesus. These questions also help Western Christians identify with the threats faced by our brothers and sisters from other countries as they seek to follow Christ. (*Source: South Asian Nation Struggles to Shape Itself, Mission Network News, 1-17-12.*)

- Jesus said that we would be persecuted because of Him, that we would be “pushed out” because of belief in Him (v. 2). Some will kill Christians, thinking that by doing so, they are offering a service to God (v.2). This was certainly the case for the 21 Christians who ISIS beheaded on a Mediterranean beach in 2015 (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2015_kidnapping_and_beheading_of_Copts_in_Libya).
- Dr. Todd M. Johnson, a Professor of Global Christianity and Mission at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminar, and his team estimate “that more than 70 million Christians have been martyred over the last two millennia, more than half of which died in the 20th century under fascist and communist regimes. We also estimate that 1 million Christians were killed between 2001 and 2010, and about 900,000 were killed from 2011 to 2020” (<https://www.gordonconwell.edu/blog/christian-martyrdom-who-why-how/>).
- Blaise Pascal, who was a theologian, mathematician, physicist, and philosopher who lived in the 1600's, observed from history and from his time, that “*Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction*” (*Blaise Pascal, Leadership, Vol. 2, no. 3*). You can read about the persecution of Christians from *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*,

Tortured for Christ, The Heavenly Man, and many other books. Please consider signing up for the Voice of the Martyrs newsletter (<https://www.persecution.com/>) and mission network news (<https://www.mnnonline.org/>).

- People who persecute and kill followers of Jesus, Christians, in the name of their “God,” don’t know God the Father at all, and they don’t know Jesus as well (v. 3).

Conclusion

- Following Jesus has a cost. He is worthy of the cost and more valuable than any pleasure this world has to offer or any pain you must endure. In light of all this, how are we to pray, and what are we to do?
- We are to pray for protection. Jesus prayed that we would be protected from evil, and we should pray this for ourselves and for others (John 17). We also should pray that faith will not fall—this is of even greater importance.
- We should not allow intimidation, separation, or persecution to keep us from testifying about Jesus—who He is, what He taught, what He has done, both in history and in our experience—and how He has changed our lives. Some people are going to hate you because you are a Christian. You need to be okay with that, and don’t be surprised. The hate that you experienced is the hate that Jesus experienced. Not everyone is going to receive the truth about Christ and His teaching. Keep teaching and keep testifying because some will hear, believe, and turn to follow Jesus and so be saved. Some who persecute Jesus can even be turned to become great lights for him. Consider Paul the Apostle, who was once named Saul.
- Trust in the help of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, and the Advocate to help us in our testimony about Christ. Ask God for help and courage. Stand up for and in Jesus. Have courage and don’t lose faith.
- Prayer for persecuted Christians, prayer for ourselves, and prayer people available.

Questions for further growth

1. What in this sermon impacted you?
2. Has following Jesus cost you something? If so, what is it?
3. Why does God allow persecution of His children? (Rev. 12:10-12, Luke 22:31-32, I Peter 1:3-9)
4. What can you do to help people who are suffering for the gospel?
5. What can you do to increase your witness for Christ and in Christ?