

John 15:18-16:4a

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[0:00] Friends, while you're standing, let's pray. Heavenly Father, would you open our hearts to hear your word this morning. In Christ's name, Amen. Amen. Yes, please be seated. Good morning, everybody. Good morning, good morning.

It's nice to see you all. If you're new with us this morning, my name is Aaron. I'm one of the ministers on staff. We're looking at John 15 this morning. Folks, it's not fun.

It's not fun to feel like you're on the outside of things, is it? I have a favorite pair of jeans, a pair of Levi's. I think they're cool. I like the way they look.

But they've started to get a bit faded recently, so I went to the Levi's store at Metrotown a couple of weeks ago just to get another pair because I wear them to work and I don't want to look shabby. Anyway, so I go to the store and I'm wearing the jeans, my favorite pair of jeans, and they've got the tag on the back. So I go to the folks who work there and I just go like this.

[1:01] I just go, I just want another pair of these. You know, they've got the numbers on the back that signify the size and style and stuff. I said, I just want another. I want a brand new pair of this exact pair of jeans.

And the very young, super hip retail workers look at me with a slightly sort of forlorn look on their face and they give me this kind of look.

They're like, yeah. Yeah, we don't really make that style anymore.

And then they add, they haven't for a while. And then they go, you know, you might be able to find it in an outlet more, maybe.

Which they might as well have said, you go to an archaeological dig or something, you know, to find these jeans. And it was this moment of realization for me. I am an uncool middle-aged man.

[2:05] And I guess it had never really landed with me. So I sadly drove to MEC and bought myself one of those Patagonia fleecy vests because I thought, that's what middle-aged men wear.

I know, I've seen you guys wear them. And I just threw down the money and bought it. And I thought, yeah, well, this is me now. This is it, you know. Sometimes you just got to realize you're on the outside.

You're on the outside. Now, how does this relate to this morning? I think it's pretty clear. I think if there's an inner circle in culture where there are the acceptable beliefs, if you become a Christian, you're going to get kicked out.

You're getting kicked out of that inner circle. It's not fun. And Jesus talks about it in the passage today. And I love how he talks about it. Do you know how Christ sometimes speaks quite indirectly about things?

Like when he uses parables and you have to do a bit of work kind of thinking it through. What's he saying? Like, am I the good Samaritan? Or am I the guy that's been robbed? And who's the innkeeper? And you have to do the work of understanding the story, right?

[3:14] Which is fine. But sometimes Jesus speaks very, very directly. And I love this morning that he speaks very directly to us. You don't have to try and work out what he's saying.

He doesn't dance around it. He says, if you're with me, you'll experience some hatred. And you'll experience it because of me. If you belong to me, some people, they're just not going to like you. So let's start with the question. Why would Jesus say this? Like, why bring it up? Remember, this is the night before the crucifixion.

He's spending time with his people and he's training them, right? He's preparing them to represent him in the world. He's going to be sending them out. But he wants them to know, when I send you out into the world, there's going to be a problem.

And the problem might be that you're going to get rejected. People might not like you. In fact, there's going to be some people who may even hate you. He wants you to be prepared for that so it's not a great shock.

[4:17] If we look at verse 1 of chapter 16, we see his purpose statement in this little section. He says, I've said these things to you to keep you from falling away. You know, when you follow Jesus and you're not shy about it, heat's going to come.

And for some folks, I think the heat gets too hot, gets too much. And I guess some people sort of say to themselves, you know what? I hate being on the outside.

I hate being the weird one who thinks the strange things. It's not worth the drama. And Jesus warns against that. So in this little section, he wants us to know, look, hatred, it's going to come, and here's how you deal with it.

Okay, so what's the next obvious question to ask of the passage? I think the next obvious question to ask is, why will it happen? Why will Christians be persecuted? It's a good question.

I mean, I'm a really nice guy. I've met many of you. A lot of you are really lovely, you know, like, just like lovely people.

[5:27] How could we have a problem? How could you have a problem with Jordan? Like, how could that be? Why is that a thing? But it does happen, doesn't it? And I know it happens.

I know some of you have been harassed. I know some of you have been negatively impacted professionally. I know some of you have been excluded from social groups because you were vocal about what you believed.

I know some of you have been accused of being narrow-minded or old-fashioned or out of step. So why does this happen? It's all about verse 18 and 19 here.

It says, So what does that mean?

It's a very important idea here. It means this. You'll be hated because you don't belong to the world. Because you belong to Jesus.

[6:32] You don't belong to the world. You belong to Jesus. That's the problem. So why is it a problem, though? Why is that a problem? Why would that garner hatred and harassment?

I mean, isn't it just, you know, aren't we just religious people doing religious stuff? What's the problem exactly? The problem is this. If you belong to Jesus, you think differently about some things.

You act differently. So if you abide with Jesus, you're out of sync with culture. And that makes you suspect. I'll say it this way.

If your life has been shaped by Christ, it can mean that you reject some of the great sort of cultural narratives of our day.

In our time, there's a certain way you think about things. And if you don't, you're not just old-fashioned. Some people will regard you as dangerous.

[7:38] I'll give you a couple of examples. The first one is just a very cliché one. You've heard it a million times. But it's just the idea of truth. I think post-moderns would say, you know, truth is personal. It's fluid.

It's all about your truth. It's about speaking your truth. And to talk about objective truth is oppressive. And Christians believe in objective truth. And that's going to get you in trouble.

I'll give you another example. This one, the idea of salvation. So I did some reading this week about the idea of salvation in the post-modern world. And this one thing I read was very interesting.

It talked about salvation in places like Vancouver. What does that mean, salvation in a place like Vancouver, outside of a religious context? What I read, they said it's all about being, it's all about authenticity.

It's about being authentic. So you're not saved from sin, right? You're saved from internalized norms. You're saved from repressive external expectations of culture and religion and that kind of

thing.

[8:41] Sounds quite lovely, but salvation in a Christian understanding is going to bump up very hard against that. Now, there's a million examples I can bring, but the big point is this.

Jesus has changed your heart and he's changed your mind. He's changed the way you think. And because of that, you're going to be out of sync with how the world thinks about a lot of things. And that can make you suspect. And for some people, they'll regard you as dangerous.

And Christ doubles down on this in verse 20. He says, remember the word I said to you. A servant is no greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they're going to persecute you. So how the world treated Jesus, well, you should actually expect to get some of that aggression as well. You could say it like this. The world still crucifies Jesus, but it crucifies the Jesus it sees in you. Let's move on to another question now.

Let's ask this question. So we've talked about why Christians have been persecuted. The sensible question to ask next of this, I think, is, so how do we engage with this? You know, if we're excluded. [9:50] Perhaps disliked. Like, what do we do with this? I want to say a couple of things here. The first things, if you ever feel sidelined because of your faith, perhaps in a social situation or family gathering or professional, if you ever feel sidelined, a good thing to ask yourself is this.

Am I being, you know, harangued because of the gospel or am I just being a bit of a jerk? That's, oh, he's nodding.

That's a fair question. That's a fair question. You know, people might dislike you, and it's actually got nothing to do with your beliefs.

It's because you're obnoxious. You're a bully. You're too strident. You're too argumentative. You're not wise. Jesus talks a lot about the persecution of Christians in the gospels.

I'll give you another example. He says here in verse, he says here in, you know, the Beatitudes, right? The Beatitudes. One of the Beatitudes is about this. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

[11:01] Look at it. Let's see what it says. You're persecuted for righteousness' sake. If you face opposition, make sure it's for Jesus' sake and not because you're obnoxious.

If you're tactless, if you're strident, if you're argumentative, friends, there is no Beatitude for you. All right? There's no Beatitude for you here. Jesus is, he doesn't have his arm around you.

He's not rooting for you in this situation. You know, it's like, oh, yes. No. So, what are we talking about? We're talking about how do we engage with this hatred? We might be on the receiving end. The first one, ask yourself, is it like, is it me? Is it me? The second thing, if you're sidelined, if you get a bit of hate, you get a bit of harangue, I really just want to say this very clearly.

Stay the course. Stay the course. Persevere. Even when it costs you greatly. In Philippians 2, it's talking about the incarnation.

[12:01] Paul says of Jesus, he says, Jesus emptied himself by taking the form of a servant. It's a great passage. A lot of you will know that passage. The old King James version of this.

So, in the ESV, it'll be emptied himself, taking the form of a servant. In the old King James, it translates it slightly differently. It says this. Jesus made himself of no reputation.

Jesus made himself of no reputation. I love that. I mean, because Jesus had the ultimate reputation, didn't he? He was really well-liked, you know?

Like, he had the heavenly reputation. He was the King of Kings. He had the name above all names. And he made himself of no reputation for our sake.

He sacrificed his reputation. He allowed himself to be mocked and beaten and hung on a cross. He gave away his reputation for you and me. Friends, if Jesus was willing to lose his reputation, I just think we can lose a little bit of our reputation.

[13:07] For the sake of being public about our faith and what we believe. So, we persevere remembering what Jesus was willing to do for us.

Okay, the last question before we finish up here. The last question is, what will this hatred look like, though? What will it look like? I think it's a good question. As I've mentioned, in the West, people

might think we're a bit suspect.

Perhaps people will think we're dangerous. We could face some social sidelining. Professionally, it might affect us. But I want to spend a moment reminding ourselves of the tremendous amount of persecution that our brothers and sisters face in the rest of the world.

And the mainstream media gives it very little attention. A few years ago, when Angela Merkel was still the German chancellor, she said in a public setting that Christians were the most persecuted religious group in the world.

And the media eviscerated her for this statement. They described her comments. They said she's misguided. She's not being sensible. These are occasionally rumored numbers.

[14:24] But she had the research to back it up. And I'll just add, the fact that that wanted to be kept quiet, the fact that people couldn't handle that truth, that they wanted to suppress that, actually I think is another form of oppression and persecution.

So I did some reading this week. I'm going to give you some worldwide stats now on Christian persecution. So in 2025, 4,849 Christians were murdered specifically for their faith.

3,632 churches and Christian properties were attacked. And 5,202 Christians were sexually assaulted, harassed, or forced into marriage.

These are terrible things. They happen quite far away, but sometimes it lands here. Sometimes we hear about it over here. You know, we had a Christian family live with us for a little while.

Christians from the Middle East. They were refugees. They lived in a Muslim-majority country in a tiny little part of it that was Christian. And at the night, the husband said to me one night, he goes, listen, if you hear my wife scream, if you hear her screaming, don't call the police.

[15:38] Like, I'm not attacking her. She just has nightmares about the stuff that she's been through. And there are people in our congregation who have been tortured, who have been in prison for their faith.

This is real stuff. And, of course, the temptation is to get so fired up about this because it gets very little attention. And we want revenge, don't we? We get so angry. We want revenge.

Where's the justice in all this? I want to point out another place that Jesus talks about Christian oppression. And this is in Matthew 10 when he says we're sheep among wolves. And he talks about in Matthew 10, he talks about how brutal this can be.

And then he ends with this. Matthew 10, 26, he says, So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed or hidden that will not be shown.

What does he mean by this? There's great comfort in this statement. It means we don't have to get just angry because we feel like nothing ever happens and there is no justice.

[16:39] What Jesus is saying here, justice will be done. No act of violence against a Christian will be unaccounted for, ultimately. And after reports I read this week, I find that very comforting.

Now, for us, though, as I said, we won't experience probably that kind of violence. It'll be more subtle for us. But what's going to be tricky about it and what we need to remember as we consider how we're going to cope with it, what's tricky for us, though, is the oppression towards Christians in the West is that sometimes it'll be applauded.

This is one of the great shocks of the passage. In verse 2, it says, 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.

They will attack Christians with a strong belief that what they're doing is right and good and just.

So oppressing Christians will seem like a good idea to the general public. And here's the point for us. Hatred directed towards Christians, oppression directed toward Christians will look reasonable from the outside.

[17:54] It could even appear noble. Now, the rights of Christians may be limited in some point in our country. And the reasons will seem reasonable to most people.

People will go along with it in the name of, you know, protecting people from harm and being on the right side of history. There was a Finnish, maybe you read about this, there was a Finnish member of parliament, a Christian woman, who tweeted a Bible verse in 2019.

She had a traditional view of Christian marriage. She tweeted a Bible verse in 2019. And she was arrested in Finland. And the charge was agitation against a minority group, which is a crime categorized under the section of Finnish criminal code concerning war crimes and crimes against humanity.

I want to remind you what she did. She tweeted a Bible verse and she was arrested and charged with crimes against humanity.

And her case in Finland is still going through the courts. If the C9 bill comes through here in Canada, we may be dealing with things like this.

[19:06] So my question was this. What will Christian hatred look like? Friends, there will come a time when it will look noble. It will look like the right thing to do.

It will look like, and the people doing it will believe themselves to be on the right side of history. We need to be prepared for that. I'm going to finish up here. Let me just say this. The temptation, of course, in all of this, this is a frightening sermon, I know, but the temptation in all of this is to keep our mouths shut.

And stay out of trouble because we don't want the drama and we don't want the hassle. But I want to remind you that Jesus calls us to be deeply engaged with the world.

Christ wants us to be deeply engaged with culture. And it will be difficult. It is difficult. I know. But remember, even though our, like, not belonging causes a drama, it's our not belonging that is our great gift to the world.

The fact that we don't belong is our gift to the world. The world needs us to be out of sync with it. So we can testify to God's goodness. So we can tell a different story.

[20:22] And it's hard to stay on course, I know, but stay the course. We will never be culturally dominant, but it's not the goal. The goal is just to be faithful, ordinary Christians who just tell the truth.

Trusting in the Holy Spirit to break through all that antagonism. Amen.