

Follow the Master

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[0 : 00] There's a true story of a small village in India.

And in this village, there was this family that came to a saving faith in Jesus Christ, a Savior and Lord. This agitated the village so much and everybody became so upset that an angry mob gathered and shoved them into the public square.

The village chief confronted them and he said to the man, If you and your family will not recant your faith, you all will surely die.

The man didn't know what to say or what to do. And so the only thing that came to mind for him were the words of a song that he himself had composed when he had first surrendered his life to God.

And so he began to sing, I have decided to follow Jesus. No turning back. No turning back. No turning back. No turning back.

[1 : 16] And with that, horrifically, his children were killed. I have decided to follow Jesus.

I have decided to follow Jesus. No turning back.

No turning back. He was given another chance, this time with his wife's life on the line.

And yet he continued to sing, Though none go with me, still I will follow. No turning back. No turning back. No turning back.

After her tragic death, he was given one final opportunity, this time to save himself. And yet he continued to sing.

[2 : 55] The cross before me, the world behind me.

The cross before me. The world behind me. The cross before me. The world behind me.

No turning back. No turning back. Even though that man and his family died on that day, something remarkable happened.

a seed was planted in the heart of that village chief, a seed that began to grow over time, and eventually he called the community together in that very same neighborhood, in that very same square, and he renounced his former faith and declared his allegiance to Jesus Christ.

And a celebration broke out in that moment, and the gospel began to flourish and to grow in that community, not just in that village, but across the whole region, because they had seen real faith, and they knew the true character of God because of a family that believed and sacrificed, even under the penalty of death.

[4 : 27] No turning back No turning back We've been working through for a few weeks now the chapters in John's gospel that we know of as the Farewell Discourse.

It's often seen as Jesus' goodbye to his disciples, but there's more going on here than just goodbye. This is more than just, I'm leaving.

This is carry on, these are marching orders, and the focus till this point has been so positive. It's been so encouraging. It's been all about comforting the disciples.

If you remember back in chapter 14, Jesus began to tell his disciples that he is leaving for the purpose of preparing a room for them, that the reason he is going is because there was more, and he is going ahead of them in preparation.

He told them about another counselor that he would give to them, another helper, who was going to be just like Jesus. They would not be left alone. There was another one coming from the Father. Even in chapter 15, the command to love, the command to bear fruit, it all comes in the context of being reminded that it's Jesus who is divine, that it's him who will empower them to love one another, that it's him who will enable them to bear fruit, that it's his Holy Spirit who will be with them, and the incredible promise in the back half of chapter 14 that the Father and the Son will make their home with these disciples even now, that they will come and that they will dwell with them in the person of the Holy Spirit.

[6 : 12] But suddenly, when we get to this second half of chapter 15, everything shifts. There's this drastic change in the tone of what Jesus has to say because he knows that there is a reality that the disciples will face that is far from comforting, that is far from easy.

And he begins in verse 18. If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belong 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. Remember the words I spoke to you. No servant is greater than his master.

If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me.

The message Jesus has for his disciples is the world will hate you. I will be with you. I'm preparing a place for you. I will make my home with you, but the world that you live in will hate you.

[7 : 21] For all the good that you try and do, for all the love that you show to your brothers and sisters, and especially for the message that you bring, that Jesus is the only hope for salvation.

Because of all that, the world will hate you. The disciples need to realize that they have chosen to follow a suffering saviour.

That the one who they are here with, the one who they are giving their lives to, has been rejected his whole life. Very soon he will be killed, crucified, and they've got to understand that's the one they're following.

Following Jesus means following Jesus. And the footsteps he took led him to the cross, led him to suffering and rejection and ultimately death.

It shouldn't be a surprise for the disciples, but this one last time, before he leaves, Jesus wants them to hear it from his mouth. The path of a Christian is one of suffering and rejection.

[8 : 29] Following Jesus means following Jesus. Look at verse 22. It says, If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin.

If I had not done among them what no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both me and my Father.

Jesus arrives and begins to preach that the kingdom of God is near, begins to preach that salvation and forgiveness is in him, begins to prove that he is the Son of God who can bring forgiveness by the power of his miracles, by the authority of his teaching, and yet they reject him.

He comes offering forgiveness and hope, but the kingdom he preached was not necessarily the kingdom that they wanted to hear about. The kingdom that Jesus preached was a kingdom of righteousness, a kingdom of holiness.

And so what it did was hold a mirror up to just how unworthy the world was. Jesus' life and his miracles and his perfect example and his message that he alone is the way, the truth and the life, took away the opportunity that the world had to deceive itself into thinking it was okay.

[9 : 53] His arrival meant that you chose him and chose life or you rejected him and chose death. It's not a surprise that the world hates Jesus.

Nobody wants to be told that they're not good enough. Nobody wants to be told that they don't measure up. And Jesus' life, in its perfect holiness and obedience, made obvious the sins of the world he went to, made obvious the sins of his people, and the lives of the disciples will continue to offend.

They will continue to show people that they're not measuring up, that the standard is not okay and people will hate them for it. We shouldn't be surprised as Christians when the world hates us.

It angers people to think that we as Christians can have contentment and hope and joy and forgiveness even when we stuff up just like they do. It angers the world to think that we can be content without the things that they need to be content with.

It angers the world that we can have joy and satisfaction even if we don't have the dream job or the dream house or the 2.3 kids. It angers them that Christians could trust Jesus to judge rather than taking revenge for themselves.

[11 : 19] It's no surprise that the world hates Jesus and it's no surprise that it hated the disciples and it shouldn't be a surprise if it hates us as well. I want you to grasp the weight of what Jesus says in this couple of verses here.

We've got the luxury. We can look back at these words thousands of years into the future. Think about what happened just after Jesus uttered these words. Within a few hours of reminding the disciples that the world hated him Jesus was arrested tortured beaten and brutally murdered.

For all but one of these 11 disciples brutal death awaited them. They would follow Jesus to the point of being killed for being a Christian.

Some would be crucified some would be beheaded some would be drawn and courted. It's not too strong to say that the world hated the disciples.

It's not too strong to say that the world hated Jesus. But the crazy thing is as we read through that and we think about what happened after Jesus spoke these words listen to verse 25 this this hatred this suffering this persecution this death this is to fulfill what was written in their law they hated me without reason.

[12 : 49] This law is the Psalms it's God's word it's the scriptures. Jesus on the cross was God's plan and the disciples and all the suffering and opposition that they faced was also part of God's plan.

It's kind of easy for us now to think of the cross as being a time when God is incredibly in control because we know how it ends. But can you imagine what it would have been like to stand there on that first Easter staring at your Saviour suffering straining for his last breath about to die and trying to be confident that God was in control.

Each one of these disciples would face their own death and Jesus needs them to understand it's part of the plan.

No matter how hard it gets no matter how tough it is it's part of the plan. God is still in control. Jesus is warning them not so that they can avoid it not so they can find a way around it but so they can endure it.

If you turn to chapter 17 where Jesus is praying for his disciples in verse 15 his prayer says my prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.

[14:10] Jesus doesn't want his disciples to miss out on this suffering and persecution that's coming he just wants them to be able to last the distance he wants them to endure he wants them to get to the other side and still be following Jesus still be going strong the suffering is part of the journey and it's part of the plan and his prayer is that the devil doesn't use the suffering to drag them away ultimately but not that the suffering disappears altogether that is part of the plan and what does Jesus call his disciples to do when the suffering and the persecution comes verse 26 when the counsellor comes who I will send to you from the father the spirit of truth who goes out from the father he will testify about me and you also must testify for you have been with me from the beginning the thing that is making them persecuted is the message that they are bringing about Jesus it is the testimony that Jesus alone can save it is the testimony that you are not good enough without Jesus it is the testimony that you need his help to be a Christian it is the thing that moves people to call Christians arrogant and exclusive it is a message that says there is one way not any way that is well intentioned there is one way to our heavenly father and that is through the son and Jesus sends his spirit after he leaves so that it might dwell in us and might remind us of the one way to heaven might remind us of the work that Jesus has accomplished in forgiving us and cleansing us and making us acceptable but more than that it will empower the disciples to testify for themselves to open their mouth and to speak out loud

Jesus chose these men that they might be witnesses to his ministry that they might be there for the three years they might hear the sermons they might see the miracles they might see him on the cross they might see him alive they might see him ascend to the throne in heaven they are eyewitnesses and Jesus has chosen these eleven men and their testimony to be the foundation for the church in the creed we said just before we said that we are an apostolic church what we mean when we say that is we are a church that is based on the eyewitness testimony of the apostles so it matters that these guys come through it matters that persecution isn't enough to make them quiet it matters that persecution isn't enough to stop them speaking of Jesus and so Jesus promises I will give you a counsellor I will give you a helper to strengthen you to remind you of what I have already done and to empower you to speak boldly no matter what opposition you might face in verse 1

Jesus explains all this I have told you so that you will not go astray these guys must last the distance they will put you out of the synagogue in fact a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God we are reminded of Paul who in Acts is standing there approving as Stephen is stoned to death Paul is killing Christians because he believes he is helping God to get rid of these upstarts who have come up with a new way but Jesus explains they will do such things because they have not known the Father or me I have told you this so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you Jesus warns them so that they know what is coming so that there is no surprises in following him so they don't go astray these 11 guys need to say with conviction I have decided to follow Jesus and there is no turning back he wants ringing in their ears as one of the last things that he says they hated me they will hate you as well but when they do continue to testify don't let the fact that your words have brought this persecution on you stop you from speaking because that is why I have left you here he chose us out of the world but he leaves us here because we are to testify because we are to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth and this kind of opposition isn't limited to this time in biblical history the message of the gospel is still hated with fierceness in fact there are some statistics that suggest that more people have been killed for following

Jesus in the 20th century than in every century beforehand combined persecution is not slowing down and even now as we meet here in church together we have brothers and sisters in Christ all over the world who are fearing for their lives simply because they call Jesus saviour simply because he is their lord and Jesus message to every one of them and his message to us is I warned you this happened to me this is the path that I trod and this is the path that you are following don't be surprised by what is going on but stand firm and testify Jesus would say to each and every one of us and every person who knows him you have tasted the goodness and mercy of God you have tasted forgiveness you know hope you know salvation and I have given you my holy spirit so that you can stand firm and testify that is the purpose that I give it don't underestimate the significance of the testimony of a persecuted

Christian it's not a coincidence that the church has grown by the blood of the martyrs after Stephen died in Acts the church exploded with growth because a persecuted Christian speaks a language that can't be denied that man in the video spoke a language that couldn't be ignored by his chief as he stood there and watched his children die and continued to sing of his love for Jesus and his commitment to his Lord that chief saw something that he didn't know as he watched his wife die and this man continued to sing of his commitment to Jesus a seed was planted in that chief because this man knew something incredible he knew some truth that this chief could not even comprehend that he could stand there and say I love my kids and they matter to me so much but

[21 : 02] Jesus is better I love my wife and she matters to me so much but Jesus is better I love my life but Jesus is better better than safety better than family better than job better than popularity glory for many Christians following Jesus means saying that it is better to know Jesus as Lord and be dead than to reject him and be alive that is a testimony that can't be disputed Jesus never promises that his followers will have an easy life it doesn't come anywhere in the Bible but he calls the disciples and he calls us as his followers now to testify about him that's why he gives us the spirit who testifies and he sends us out in the power of that spirit to preach the message of a risen Savior who is the only way to the Father but he does say he does warn us if you do it you'll be persecuted if you do what

I'm asking you to do if you follow the path that I'm setting out in front of you the world will be hate you that is how it works but what does that mean for us here in Sydney as you watch that video as you hear other stories of people suffering all over the world for their faith it's hard to really understand we have no idea what it would be like to have a gun to our face we have no idea what it would be like to be threatened with our own lives just for following Jesus so what does this mean for us should we be praying for more persecution should we be asking God to send more gunmen just so that we can testify that way no that would be stupid it's not smart to pray that somebody threatens my wife's life just so that I can talk about Jesus but at very least on some level we have to ask the question why is the world so comfortable with us why don't we face more opposition why don't we have people hate us

Chris was reflecting we were chatting earlier in the week that he worked through this passage with his small group and that trying to wrestle with that word hate was really difficult trying to think of a time where we've been hated for our faith is difficult because the reality is I don't think many of us have and we have to ask the question on some level why is that maybe for us persecution looks different it isn't guns for us it isn't the threat of losing our very lives but it's still there it's still there in the pressure from the culture that we live in it's not a moment where you obviously choose I'm going to stand up and proclaim Jesus or I'm going to shrink back and be quiet and protect myself but maybe it's those opportunities in your life that are a bit more subtle the times where you can choose to stand up and testify to

Jesus with the way you live or you can choose to compromise with the way you live the opportunities you have as you're driving to just compromise a little bit and just go with everyone else 10k's over the speed limit or to testify that Jesus is Lord by obeying the law that is set there the opportunity you have to stand up and speak about what you did on Sunday night or instead maybe you just compromise and don't really talk about it in case someone might get angry or offended I sometimes wonder if we would go better if we had guns to our heads if the choice was more obvious about standing up for Jesus and denying him I wondered if we would do better but we don't have a gun to our head we have what God has given us we have the blessing of the country that we live in and we have the blessing of lots of subtle opportunities lots of day-to-day choices that we can make to testify that Jesus is better the choices to tell the truth even when you know it's going to cost you the choices to be different to the people around you because you know it's what God wants the choice to open your mouth and say

Jesus is the only way to heaven the response you make when you have that awkward conversation when someone finds out you're a Christian and they ask you do you think I'm going to hell do you water it down and say oh it's hard to say I'm not really sure or do you say well Jesus is the only way to get to heaven is he your Lord the instruction in this passage is testify the instruction isn't go looking for suffering go looking for persecution that'll happen but the instruction the command to the disciples and the command to us is be bold and be fearless you don't need to muster up courage the spirit is in you testifying to Jesus Jesus is the best thing you've got all you've got to do is open your mouth and tell people about him the forgiveness you know the hope you have the salvation that you have experienced is better than anything that this world has to offer and this passage is just telling us to open our mouths and talk about it you don't have to come up with a gospel presentation just tell people how good Jesus is and what he's done for you just say I am forgiven because

[27 : 12] Jesus died in my place that is what this passage is telling us to do to stand up and testify no matter what it costs to be able to stare not just death but every compromise to stare the pressure of a culture in the face and say I have decided to follow Jesus no turning back no turning back because he is better than anything that video we watched just earlier is emotional we can hear a story like that and be devastated at the cost that that man had to pay just to follow Jesus and that's right but maybe even more we can be inspired that he knew what it was to be completely satisfied by his saviour that he was able to sing in the face of loss that we can barely comprehend sing in the face of death because his treasure could never be taken from him

Jesus says tonight it costs everything to follow me don't try and avoid the opposition or the difficulty it's inevitable instead know that it's coming be prepared pray and ask that God will give you eyes to see those little subtle opportunities to testify pray that he will give you boldness pray that he'll give you the words to say so that you can stand firm and testify pray that you will be so satisfied in Jesus so content so joy filled with your treasured Jesus that there is nothing that anyone could possibly try and offer you to drag you away from him you also must testify because you know that Jesus is better father God we want to admit that so often we choose silence we choose safety we choose the path of least resistance when Lord we know that that's not how you work we know that saying yes to you means that we will be opposed means that we will be hated father we ask that you would so fill us with your spirit and so satisfy us in your son that we would not be able to help but talk about you no matter what the reaction is no matter what the opposition is that we wouldn't be able to close our mouths because we are so overwhelmed and in awe of your love and your mercy and your goodness father keep us from compromise empower us and empower

Christians all over the world in all circumstances to speak your truth so that you get the glory to speak your truth so that others might be drawn in to testify of your goodness father we thank you for Jesus because he is our treasure because he is the most valuable thing amen things you what you you