

## John 15.18-16.4a—Sheep Sent to the Wolves

- I. Introduction
  - a. The prosperity gospel would say that something is wrong with your faith if you are suffering as you follow Christ but the Bible teaches there's something wrong with your faith if you are not suffering with Jesus.
  - b. I could share stories all day about Christians who died for the faith. One story stands out from Church History which is the Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas. Their martyrdom happened in Carthage which is modern day Tunisia in North Africa in March of AD 203. I've stood in the ruins of the coliseum in which they died.
    - i. "Perpetua was a woman of twenty-two, nursing an infant son, of some social standing in Carthage, whose father tried [multiple times] to dissuade her from her Christian confession. She, like the others, was still a catechumen at the time of her arrest, but was soon baptized. Her diary is notable for her dreams that give insight into popular piety. Felicitas was her slave, who gave birth to a child while in prison" (Everett Ferguson, 85).
    - ii. The time leading up to their trial was long. Maybe they hoped they would recant. It is reported that some of the deacons bribed the jailer to let them bring her young baby boy to nurse over that period of time. Felicitas was afraid that she would not be allowed to join her companions in martyrdom because it was against the law for pregnant women to be put to death. However, she had her baby two days before the event to which she rejoiced.
    - iii. For converting to Christ, these two women along with three male companions were put to death by wild beasts or the sword. All of them remained faithful to the end, by the grace of God.
  - c. Have you asked these questions: why do Christians suffer? Why doesn't God intervene? How could he let that happen? And yet, as we will see in this text, the role of the Holy Spirit of God is there to bear witness...testify...about Jesus. And usually that witness of Christ was and is the reason for their suffering.
  - d. Why must it be this way? (Matt. 10:16)<sup>16</sup> "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves." What do wolves do to sheep? I can tell you it's not to have a friendly chat. However, suffering for Jesus and the gospel is one of the means by which God makes himself known and saves people. This is the calling of a disciple of Christ, the Suffering Servant, not to be surprised when it happens.
- II. Main Point
  - a. In contrast to the previous passage and for clear reasons, loving one another is necessary in the midst of a world that is opposed, whether indifferent or hostile, to Jesus and his followers. The main point is the fact that the world hates Jesus and those who follow him.
- III. Outline-
  - a. Being Identified with Jesus results in being hated by the world (18-20)
  - b. Not identifying with Jesus leaves you guilty (21-25)
  - c. The Holy Spirit is sent to bear witness about Jesus (26-27)
  - d. Some who identify as knowing God persecute those who follow Jesus (1-4a)
- IV. Exposition
  - a. Jesus is the cause of his disciples being hated by the world.
    - i. As Jesus continues to prepare his disciples for his departure, we hear Jesus informing them not of a mere possibility but a certain reality that the world will hate them.
    - ii. The hatred of the world toward those who follow Jesus is a direct result of the world's hatred of Jesus.
      1. Jesus says, "Understand that it has hated me first."
        - a. Have you ever thought about when this hatred began? It started around Christmas! (Matt. 2:1-5) Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem,<sup>2</sup>

saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." <sup>3</sup> When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; <sup>4</sup> and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. <sup>5</sup> They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea

- b. (Matt. 2:16) <sup>16</sup> Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under.
  - c. There are two types of opposition here. The aggressive hostility of Herod but also the indifference of the chief priests and scribes. They were not looking for the Messiah. He meant nothing to them.
  - d. His own people gave him up and Herod slaughtered all the baby boys in Bethlehem.
  - e. Later, though he was a threat from the day of his birth, Jesus would clearly say why the world hated him in (Jn. 7:7) it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil.
- iii. Hold on. Jesus is commanding his disciples to love one another so that all peoples will know that they are his disciples. If the world identifies them as followers of Jesus, who they already hate, then loving each other will result in the world hating them.
1. I would suggest to you that this is not only the result but as I've already said it is part of the plan and means to make Christ known.
  2. I think when I finally understood the suffering of God's people wasn't meaningless, much of the Bible made sense.
    - a. The suffering in Acts and the rest of the NT will either cause you to think God is pretty pathetic and you will begin to question His goodness. However, I would rather you see the divine purpose in it.
    - b. What does Paul mean when he says this? (Col. 1:24-26) <sup>24</sup> Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, <sup>25</sup> of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, <sup>26</sup> the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.
    - c. The sufferings of Christ are not lacking anything except being made known! Paul's suffering for the gospel makes the word of God fully known.
    - d. This is why Christians are willing to suffer for the Name!
- iv. But there is a way to avoid being hated by the world. Simply do not identify as a follower of Jesus and identify as being one of them. I suppose it's possible to appear neutral by way of silence. But silence doesn't seem to be an option for a disciple as we will see later. Bearing witness is just who we are.
1. Verse 19 affirms that the world loves its own. I often hear people who have nothing to do with Jesus refer to one another as brother. There is a brotherhood of the world that's easy to fit in. That's why gangs are have an appeal.
  2. But Jesus gives the reason in v. 19 why the world hates them
    - a. "...because you are not of the world"
      - i. Why are they not of the world? Because "he chose them out of the world."
        1. The world was created through him and for him. But the world has rejected him.

2. He is holy and good. He is Lord and King. He is God and Man. And unbelievably, he came to save humanity by dying in our place.
3. But much of the world will have nothing of it.
  - ii. However, Jesus chose people out of the world to be his disciples.
    1. And the world hates them.
- v. How should a disciple respond to the world's hatred? Jesus says, "Remember, 'A servant is not greater than his master.'"
  1. The explanation for this is, if they persecuted me, the Master, they will also persecute you, the servants.
    - a. That means, the Lord taught his disciples to observe all his commands which the world hates and they will persecute them for being like Jesus, their Master.
  2. (1 Jn. 3:12-13)<sup>12</sup> We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.<sup>13</sup> Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you.
- b. This next section makes clear the rejection of Jesus and his works which clearly revealed the Father and that he was the Son of God which leaves the world guilty and without excuse.
  - i. In verse 21, Jesus states, "All these things they will do you on account of my name."
    1. The phrase "All these things" isn't very clear yet. But whatever they are, the world will do them to his disciples.
    2. And the reason they will do this looks forward to the time after Jesus has departed to the Father and his disciples continue the mission of Jesus in his Name.
      - a. In the name people will be saved: (Acts 2:21) And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.'
      - b. In the name people will walk again: (Acts 3:6) But Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!"
      - c. In the name, his disciples will suffer: (Acts 5:40-41)<sup>40</sup> and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.<sup>41</sup> Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for **the name**.
    3. And this suffering comes about, why? (Jn. 15:21) because they do not know him who sent me.
      - a. These people, as we will see, are mainly very religious people, Jews, who would say they believe in YHWH. They meet at the synagogue to teach, give, pray, and read scripture.
      - b. But Jesus declares that they do not know him. The question may come to mind, what does Jesus mean by know?
        - i. The writer of Hebrews says that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the radiance of God's glory and the exact imprint of His nature. Jesus has said, "To see me is to see the Father."
          1. If they do not see the Father in Jesus then they do not know God. But it is rejection not from lack of evidence. Roman 1.
          2. It should cause us to evaluate whether we know God. Is our understanding based on the Scriptures or have we created our own idol?
  - ii. Verses 22 and 24 are nearly identical. The difference in content is "came and spoke" in 22 and "displaying among them the works that no one else did" in 24.

1. Jesus came just as it was written. Jesus spoke the words of the Father.
  2. He did the works, not just miracles, but many deeds that no one else did because he is God.
    - a. When Elijah asked that it not rain, he asked God.
    - b. When Jesus stilled the storm, he didn't ask God. He commanded the wind to stop and it did.
  3. All that they had heard and seen leaves them without excuse. They are guilty.
- iii. Why is Jesus saying this?
1. If I were to say that so and so hated me, wouldn't you want some proof? It would be, not only odd, but lying to say that without cause.
  2. Jesus is making it very clear that their rejection of him and hatred of him is without cause.
  3. And in doing so, they are fulfilling Psalm 35:19 and 69:4. In Psalm 69, David is hurling curses upon his tormentors. The great difference between David and Jesus is that he will pray for his enemies, not against them.
- c. Some very encouraging news comes in verses 26 and 27. (Jn. 15:26-27) <sup>26</sup> "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. <sup>27</sup> And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.
- i. The primary task of the Holy Spirit has repeatably been making the truth known and remembered concerning Jesus.
  - ii. Jesus says that the Spirit of Truth will bear witness about him! I get a little confused when I hear the primary task of the Holy Spirit being something else.
  - iii. The word for "bear witness" is **μαρτυρέω** (martureo). It's the word we get our English word martyred.
    1. "After all the negative things he has said, Jesus now promises the coming of the Paraclete as the one who bears witness (martureo) to him, this is...intended to reassure the disciples that in the enormous opposition they encounter in the world they will not stand alone" (Ridderbos 526).
    2. In other words, the role of the Spirit is not to rescue someone from martyrdom but bearing witness to the truth through these disciples who may in fact lose their life.
    3. As I was thinking about this, I thought of what Jesus told Paul in a vision at Corinth when the suffering was very intense: (Acts 18:9-11) <sup>9</sup> And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, <sup>10</sup> for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people." <sup>11</sup> And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.
      - a. Certainly, this isn't the case every time for Paul. He was attacked and harmed in some places. But for a year and six months, no one touched him in the city if Corinth.
  - iv. One of the unmistakable traits of Christians in the book of Acts is the role of witness. That's just who they/we are.
    1. I recall in the story of Perpetua when her father, a pagan, begged her to deny her faith, she said, "Father, do you see this vase? He said, "Yes." "Can it be called by any other name than what it is?" "No," he replied. "In the same way, I can be called by no other name than what I am, I am a Christian."
    2. This young woman would not be persuaded even by her father to turn away from Christ whom she identified with. And eventually, bore witness before the courts and the crowd at the coliseum that her faith was in Jesus Christ.

- d. These last four verses inform the disciples of specific ways they will be persecuted.
  - i. He doesn't want them to be surprised when they are hated by the world. And he has warned them of this opposition, as it says in (Jn. 16:1) for this purpose "I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away.
    - 1. Brothers and sisters, this word Jesus speaks to his disciples is not empty and powerless. It is effective! Jesus is keeping his disciples from falling away by speaking these things to them and they believe.
      - a. I think of God creating the matter out of nothing to help me see his powerful word here. Peter will soon be afraid of a small servant girl but then later will stand before courts and the crowds and proclaim Christ boldly after the coming of the Holy Spirit.
      - b. We do not have the resources to do what God calls us to do in ourselves. Strength and boldness come from God alone. He will supply!
  - ii. It's obvious that Jesus is speaking about the Jews in this section. But I can affirm that this sort of stuff happens among religious people in all kinds of churches too.
    - 1. He says they will put you out of the synagogues. I can quote many texts from Acts where this happens but I think you know that.
    - 2. I guess I want you to be very aware that religious people who claim to know God can do some pretty wicked things.
    - 3. Indeed, one of the most religious men of that day, was zealously putting Christians in prison and watching over those who stoned Stephen to death. Who might that be? You got it, Paul.
      - a. I would have labeled him as a terrorist who was in one of those extremely radical groups. But Someone knocked him off his horse and he gave up his rubbish, as he called it, for the sake of knowing Christ Jesus.
      - b. He would have said exactly what Jesus predicted here: (Jn. 16:2) Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service (literally divine worship) to God.
  - iii. This section ends much like the previous ones.
    - 1. They do these things because they have not known the Father, nor Jesus. Rejection of Christ leads to hatred, persecution, and martyrdom.
    - 2. When the hour comes...and it's just an hour...it's very short, remember that I have told them to you.

#### V. Response

- a. Do not be surprised that the world hates those who follow Jesus.
- b. For those who do not follow Jesus, does he mean anything to you? Indifference is opposition. Repent and believe!
- c. Suffering for following Jesus isn't meaningless. (2 Cor. 4:17) <sup>17</sup> For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.
- d. (Rev. 3:8) <sup>8</sup> "I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.
- e. Suffering for Christ is propagating the gospel!