

I. My Notes ... WWC message 5/24 (Memorial Day Weekend)

II. Series: That You Might Believe

- Title: Persecution and Protection – Part 1
- Text: John 15:18-16:14
- Quote: Persecution is simply the clash between two irreconcilable value-systems. John Stott (Author, Pastor)

III. Memorial Day

- This is Memorial Day Weekend, as we come together to spend time in worship and reflection, we take a moment to honor those who have laid down their lives in service to this nation. Memorial Day is more than a holiday—it is a sacred remembrance of sacrifice, courage, and love for one's fellow man.

Scripture tells us in **John 15:13**, *"No one has greater love than this, to lay down his life for his friends."* (CSB). On this day, we recognize the men and women who embodied that love, who fought and fell so that others might live in freedom.

May we not only remember their sacrifice but also be inspired by their selflessness. Let their devotion call us to live lives of service, to love one another deeply, and to hold fast to the values of faith, unity, and gratitude.

As we spend these moments together, let us pray for the families who grieve, for those who continue to serve, and for peace in our world. May this time together strengthen our faith and remind us that the greatest freedom we hold is the one given through Christ—freedom from sin, freedom through grace, and the promise of eternal life.

Let us honor, let us remember, and let us be ever grateful.

IV. Introduction

- The words and teachings of Jesus are as applicable today as they were when He was preparing His Disciples to continue on without Him remaining in their presence. We find ourselves in a passage that speaks directly to the reality of being a follower of Christ in a world that often stands in opposition to Him. In John 15:18-25, Jesus gives a warning: “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.” These words were not spoken only for the disciples 2,000 years ago—they resonate deeply with us today.

We live in a time when standing firm in biblical truth can invite criticism, isolation, or even outright hostility. Public expressions of faith are scrutinized, moral convictions are challenged, and the values of Christ often clash with the priorities of the world. This is not new—it is the continuation of the spiritual battle that has existed since Jesus walked the earth.

- The question we must ask ourselves is this: How should believers today respond to rejection and opposition? Do we retreat in fear? Do we compromise our convictions for the sake of comfort? Or do we, like Christ, stand unwavering in truth while responding with grace and love?

Jesus did not promise an easy road, but He did promise that we would never walk it alone. The Holy Spirit empowers us to face resistance with courage, not bitterness, with conviction, not aggression. Our response must be marked by faithfulness—choosing to remain steadfast in our beliefs while demonstrating the love of Christ in the face of adversity.

- Today, we will explore how we, as present-day believers, can navigate these challenges with wisdom and strength. We are called to be a light, even when the darkness presses in. We are called to endure, not in despair, but in the hope of Christ's ultimate victory. And above all, we are called to love—even when it costs us.

V. Text

- **John 15:18-25 GNT**

18 "If the world hates you, just remember that it has hated me first. 19 If you belonged to the world, then the world would love you as its own. But I chose you from this world, and you do not belong to it; that is why the world hates you. 20 Remember what I told you: 'Slaves are not greater than their master.' If people persecuted me, they will persecute you too; if they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours too. 21 But they will do all this to you because you are mine; for they do not know the one who sent me. 22 They would not have been guilty of sin if I had not come and spoken to them; as it is, they no longer have any excuse for their sin. 23 Whoever hates me hates my Father also. 24 They would not have been guilty of sin if I had not done among them the things that no one else ever did; as it is, they have seen what I did, and they hate both me and my Father. 25 This, however, was bound to happen so that what is written in their Law may come true: 'They hated me for no reason at all.'"

- This passage highlights the conflict between the world's ways and the teaching of Jesus. We need to be prepared.

VI. Contrast

- We ended our time together last week with a command ... *Love one another*. (15:17). Jesus has been talking to the Disciples about

remaining in Him, abiding in His love. And we do this by following His commands (ordinances). As believers, doing our best to follow the words of Jesus, we are to attempt to outdo each other in the way we love one another. It's about seeing and encouraging the best in each person. It is serving them in a way that touches them with the mercy and grace that has touched us.

- Jesus changes the dialogue here. He points out opposing attitudes and actions from what He just said in verse 17. When Jesus states that “the world” hates us because it hated Him first. Know that He isn't just talking about the physical world or even humanity in general. Jesus is referring to those (anyone) who are choosing their way over God's way – they are choosing spiritual blindness when, in fact, Grace and Truth has been residing in their presence, ministering to them. The influence and deception of sin (self) is a strong force and this pride is what may be driving them towards opposing God and His love.
- Understand this, Jesus tells us that we are not “of the world.” By this He means that we are not part of the system or culture that stands in opposition to the Lord God. Believers recognize that in Christ we have victory – over death (there is a certainty of eternity), over sin (progress not perfection), and over the struggles that come with this fallen world. The Apostle Paul spoke of our “citizenship” being in Heaven (see Philippians 3:20). While our temporary residence is here, we have a purpose, and it is a purpose that the world disagrees with. This disagreement will lead to persecution – to criticism and judgment because of a lack of understanding.
- Since being a believer means a choice that differs from what the world deems important, it puts one in opposition to the self-serving

system that society mandates today. This can create an environment of hostility.

- Now, in our country (the US) we might not experience persecution on the level of others. But it is just as real. Our choice to follow Jesus can cause familial rejection, breakdown in relationships, personal criticism, and hatred. Believers in North Korea face imprisonment and execution; in Nigeria there is constant violence against Christ-followers; China employs advanced surveillance to monitor and catch Christians. They see the Christian church as a threat against their government. Yet, these believers, and others all over the world are praying for the church in America. We have become complacent and are looking for the next good feeling or entertaining event. The church needs to be about the truth of God's love and message of grace.

VII. Accountability

- This hatred is ultimately a rejection of God – of His compassion and kindness, of mercy and understanding. It is a choice to remain blind to the need for salvation.
- The persecution and prejudice of righteousness is nothing new. David wrote about it in the Psalms – in his prayers and praises to the Lord.
- **Psalm 35:19 NCV** - *Do not let my enemies laugh at me; they hate me for no reason. Do not let them make fun of me; they have no cause to hate me.*
- **Psalm 69:4 NCV** - *There are more people who hate me for no reason than hairs on my head; powerful enemies want to destroy me for no reason. They make me pay back what I did not steal.*

- These are Messianic Psalms – the point to the “suffering servant” – they foreshadow the life and experiences of Jesus Christ. Jesus was rejected because of His teachings, because of the miracles He did, especially by the religious leaders. They tried to trick Him; they tried to catch Him in error. Ultimately, they accused and condemned Him for reasons they fabricated.
- Jesus spoke truth ... The truth of God’s love, of God’s desire for a relationship with man, the truth of our need for a Savior – the He was the way for us to find peace and purpose. If He had not come, man would have an excuse for their sins. If He had not come and shown others the power and glory of God, there would be excuses that God didn’t care – that He wasn’t capable. Jesus came and removed the excuses.
- Shouldn’t we do our best to do the same things?
- The message Jesus brought, the Good News, has been rejected for more than 2000 years. Sometimes violently, other times deceptively. Today, this rejection comes from within the confines of the church itself. The message of grace is being altered to fit into the ideals that man wants to hold.
- The teaching that God is love is one that everyone wants (and needs) to hear. But teaching that Jesus is just that example of love and morality and not God goes against what He said. Being a “good person” is the goal for many. But teaching that being moral is what gets you to Heaven, that Salvation – confession of sins and being forgiven – isn’t necessary is a teaching that leads people to believe that they gain Heaven on their own. These are just a couple of the paths that are being taught by some in the church today ... We must be aware.

VIII. Warning

- Before I get to the last point, I want to jump ahead a bit.
- **John 16:1 CSB**
“I have told you these things to keep you from stumbling.”
- Jesus is taking the last moments He has with His Disciples to warn them. To ensure they are grounded in the truth. And to get them ready to take the next step on their faith journey.
- Jesus is speaking plainly to them. Even with this it doesn't get them ready for what is about to happen. It is a lesson for us. The lesson is trust. When things seem ready to fall apart, when the moments get more than difficult, we need to trust in the truth that Jesus is with us – that He bore the burden and paid the cost – and that through Him wholeness is the result.
- In hard times, some choose to abandon their faith. They blame their suffering on the Lord God – either He is punishing them for some unresolved or undeclared sin (that isn't how God works) or He has abandoned them to figure it out on their own (which goes against what He said).
- Jesus explained it so we could understand. And He told us that a Helper was on the way.

IX. Help

- How do you stand in the face of persecution? How do you cope when devastation is coming? Jesus had told His Disciples earlier in the conversation that a Helper would be coming (see John 14:15-17). Now, He is going to explain this some more.
- **John 15:26-27 GNT**

26 “The Helper will come—the Spirit, who reveals the truth about God and who comes from the Father. I will send him to you from the Father, and he will speak about me. 27 And you, too, will speak about me, because you have been with me from the very beginning.”

- Each person has an opportunity to respond to the call (the prompting) of the Holy Spirit. The duty of the Holy Spirit is to reveal the truth of God’s love and help us understand (and apply) the lessons that Jesus taught.
- The Holy Spirit is misunderstood. He hasn’t been talked about enough for many reasons. People are scared of the fanaticism that accompanies the ministry of the Spirit. Much of these behaviors and attitudes are attributed to the Spirit because people don’t understand His role.
- Jesus began to explain it. Now, He is clarifying it a bit more. And the explanation will continue. The Father will (and has) send the Holy Spirit just as He sent Jesus. To minister to mankind. The Holy Spirit will speak of what Jesus has said and continue to help each believer understand the truth of God’s love and grace.
- And because the Holy Spirit guides us and teaches us, we will be able to reveal Jesus, as Messiah – as Lord – to those around us.

X. Last Things

- Let’s get really clear about some things. Jesus has been using the “less thans” as His ministry team for three plus years. He is preparing them to be the foundation of the NT church. And because of this, these apostles’ names are inscribed on the city wall of the New Jerusalem (see Revelation 21:14). Today, because of the Holy

Spirit, the “less thans” are ministers of the Gospel of Grace to the world – those who desperately need forgiveness and acceptance.

- Those who God has chose aren’t always wealthy and powerful; they aren’t physically whole in the eyes of the world; they aren’t immune from struggles or difficulties. In fact, they may be persecuted or suffering at this very moment. In whatever they might be facing, they are choosing to put God first, to honor Him by testifying of His love and grace. To serve others without reservation.
- The health and wealth gospel has done a lot of damage to sincere people who want nothing more than the love and acceptance that comes from a relationship with Jesus Christ. We have the privilege of living that calling, of being that person that points another to Jesus – the Author and Perfecter of our faith.
- Let’s Pray
- Grace First, Grace Always
- We will finish this next week. It is a deeper discussion of the Holy Spirit