

John 15.18-16.4

Grow pt 5: When the world hates you

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Introduction

When Stoyan was twelve years old, they imprisoned his father in Eastern Europe after the end of WW2. A couple of years ago he told his story to a man named Nik Rypken who would share it in a book called *Insanity of God*. His father was put in prison because the police discovered he was a Christian. "Every morning one of the guards would take some of his own human waste and spread it on a piece of toast that he brought to Stoyan's father for breakfast." His father was imprisoned for 10 years. More than 10,000 were killed in prisons like this during those years..

In one last attempt to make him deny Christ, the guards informed him that he was scheduled for execution. They took Stoyan's dad outside, tied him to a pole and ordered him to deny his faith. Despite the pressure, "He straightened his back, stood tall and declared, "I will not deny Christ." The guards were furious. Evidently, the prison warden gave the guards orders to release him and they did this as one last effort to break him. Years after his release he became a pastor. One day he was asked by an older woman to come pray for her sick son. When he walked into the room of her sick son he was shocked. It was the guard

that spread his waste on his breakfast all those years. He prayed for strength and was able to forgive him and pray over this sick man. This story led to the salvation of many people in eastern Europe.

Little Stoyan eventually become a pastor in his father's footsteps, largely influenced by the compassion his father showed that former guard. The police especially targeted Christian pastors and so to no surprise Stoyan himself spent time in prison for professing his faith in Christ as well.

Stoyan told Ripken that "I take great joy knowing that I was suffering in prison in my country, so that you, Nik, could be free to share Jesus in Kentucky." Ripken responded by telling him that this was a debt he could never repay him. Stoyan stared right back at him and said, "Son, that's the debt of the cross!" He then poked Ripken in the chest and said, "Don't you steal my joy! I took great joy that I was suffering in my country, so that you could be free to witness in your country." This led to Ripken's reflection: "Have we given up in freedom what others had refused to surrender under persecution?"

Today we are going to be challenged try and figure out how in the world the passage we read applies to us. Because the passage is about how to think and act when we Christians are living in a world where we are hated and persecuted for our faith. And the reality is most of you have never had your life or livelihood threatened for being a Christian.

Some of you have, but most have not. Increasingly though we do face opposition because of our faith so, Here's what I hope happens as a result of our time together: I hope you see the power of the gospel to help you overcome the opposition you encounter because of your faith.

We are going to answer one question at the end of our time today: **how do you live in a world opposed to Christ?**

As a side bar objective, I also want today to warn you non Christians what you are getting into if you throw your lot in with Jesus.

Much like we normally do, I'm going to walk through the passage and develop an understanding of what the author is saying. Then we'll get after some take home ideas for us.

[18] "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you."

The world hates Christ. I want that to sink in because in our façade of tolerance that we all live in, its easy to think this isn't true. The "world" in bible language means those who are not Christians. And those who are not Christians, John says, hate Christ. Pretty strong language! Most non-christians would say come on man I don't hate Jesus. I just don't believe he's God.

But listen the more you understand what Jesus said the more you will either love or hate him. You won't remain indifferent. Here's why: Christ makes a claim on your life.

An authoritative claim. He says he is in charge OF YOU, not you. That's his claim. He says he is LORD. So you MUST obey him. That is absolute. You obey his commands. You surrender your whole life and the rest of it you do his will not yours. That is costly! Following Jesus costs you your life. It isn't free.

And if you do not...you are a sinner and a rebel and you are destined for eternity apart from God. Jesus tells the world all its deeds are evil. And the only way you can be reconciled to God is to surrender your life and place your full hope on Jesus for your salvation. Now, if you don't believe you are a sinner and Jesus is calling you one, That's Offensive! Not only that, he's telling you that you are so bad of a sinner you will spend eternity apart from God! That's really offensive! And in scripture...Jesus didn't have many people who understood him that were indifferent about him. Once they understood him, They either loved him or tried to kill him.

The GOSPEL IS OFFENSIVE!

In fact, a motto on our volunteer teams is that the Gospel is Offensive so nothing else should be! So we work hard to help you feel loved and cared for as you come in here because we know when you hear the gospel, if we preach it right, will offend you if you aren't fully surrendered to Jesus. Encouraged yet?

[19] If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

This is a pretty simple idea you just have to let sink in. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. See for the disciples this is an affirmation that the persecution they are experiencing makes sense. There are two sides to the line Jesus is drawing. Like Duke & UNC. My best friend growing up was a duke fan. When you are “of” duke, you dress up as a Cameron crazy and go nuts and fellow Duke fans love you. because you are one of them. But, when you finally see the light and convert to being a UNC fan (which he finally did in college), all of the sudden those who loved you now hate you. Because you are wearing new colors. To them, you’ve gone to the enemy!

Well, in a similar way when you become a Christian you change colors. You act differently than you used to act because you desire different things than you used to desire. And not everybody is ok with that.

DA Carson said it this way: “Former rebels who have by the grace of the king been won back to loving allegiance to their rightful monarch are not likely to prove popular with those who persist in rebellion.”¹

¹ Carson, D.A. *The Gospel according to John* from the PNTCS (Eardmans Grand Rapids, MI 1991) 525.

You ever experienced this? Ever experienced opposition for following Jesus from people you used to get along with? Our college director was telling us about his baseball team he played on in college. A certain sorority did a draft of the baseball players, each girl picking the player they were going to sleep with. So some girl comes to him and he’s like...not happening. His baseball teammates proceeded to ridicule and laugh at him from that point on.

When you are no longer in their world, they will despise you. lets keep going

[20] Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’

The servant not greater than his master – quote from John 13 when Jesus was washing the disciples feet. Those who preach Jesus’ gospel and live in progressive conformity to his own life and teaching will attract the same antagonism he did.²

If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.[21] But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.

They persecuted Christ. In fact the worst persecution is getting ready to come. He’s about to be killed for saying that he is the son of God. And the crowd seethes with hate against him. So much so, that when given the choice

² Carson, 525.

between freeing Jesus and a hardened criminal, the crowd lets the hardened criminal go free. So, because they persecute me...when I'm gone...they will turn their eyes onto you. And they did.

Of the 11 remaining disciples after Jesus' death, history records that John was the only one not killed for his faith. James the brother of John was beheaded, Philip was crucified, Matthew was beheaded, James Jesus' brother was thrown off the top of the temple and when that didn't kill him they bashed his head in with a club. Matthias, the guy who replaced Judas, he was stoned and beheaded. Andrew the brother of Peter was beheaded. Mark was tied to a chariot and dragged to pieces for preaching the gospel in Alexandria. Peter was crucified upside down. Paul was beheaded in Rome. Keep going Jude was crucified at Edessa. Thomas preached the gospel in India. Was tortured, speared several times, and thrown into an oven.³

Does that unsettle you? That's the founders of our faith. They were killed because they followed Christ. Christianity was not popular and never has been since.

While I was pastoring in Raleigh-Durham there was a Christian music group on campus at UNC-Chapel Hill. One of the many student run organizations you can join and participate in while at UNC. Anyways it came to light that one of the members of the group was engaged in sexual sin.

³ Foxxe, John. *The New Foxxe's Book of Martyr's*. (Bridge-Logos, North Brunswick NJ, 1997) 3-8.

He wasn't at all repentant about it. This was a Christian group committed to God's design for sex and so they asked him to leave the group. The leaders of that group had their names dragged through mud for weeks because of that. They suffered public and personal attacks because of their choice to follow God's commands.

If they persecute Christ, they will persecute his followers.

[22] If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. [23] Whoever hates me hates my Father also. [24] If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father.

In short: Before they knew their sin was sin, they weren't guilty. But now they have no excuse. So if they deny Christ's payment for their salvation, They are guilty.

Ex: "no diving sign at the pool." – Ben does a giant belly flop. Doesn't know any better. Feels good. Then I say "hey buddy there is a no diving sign over there." Well, now he has a choice doesn't he? Now that he knows diving is against the rules...A new thought that wasn't in his head is now in his little head. He can obey or disobey. And now when he does the exact same action he just did seconds before...now its done with new motive. It's defiance. And now he is guilty.

Now they...and we...have heard the gospel. We've heard that we are sinners in need of a savior. So we cannot hide behind the rock of ignorance.

Rejection of Jesus' words & works is thus the rejection of the clearest light, the fullest revelation; and therefore it incurs the most central, deep-stained guilt.

I humbly say to you if you are not a Christian that today you are hearing the gospel message. Which means you can no longer declare ignorance about God's message to you. You have to weigh it out. I will never stand up here and try to force you into Christ. But the gospel is clear you are either with Christ 100% or you are not. There is no middle ground.

[25] But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: 'They hated me without a cause.'

What word? Most likely this is a reference to Psalm 69.4 which most understood to be a messianic Psalm. By that I mean the passage was written by David talking about his life...and at the same time talking about someone else. It was talking about the messiah or "savior" who would one day bring permanent victory and peace to Israel. And the irony of Jesus' words here is that the very people hating me right now...the Jewish leaders...They are the ones fulfilling their own scriptures.

the hatred of the world against Jesus is not only unjustified, but those who hate are condemned out of their own bible.

- "This sort of passage, of course, is as relevant to prospective new converts as to mature Christians who are waning in their zeal or flagging under opposition. It sets out the historic basis on which Christianity is to be believed, and the kind of life and witness expected of all Christians. When the church is facing persecution, it is especially important for prospective converts to have some idea what conversion will let them in for."⁴

16. [1] "I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. [2] 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. [3] And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. [4] But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you.

Point: Why has Jesus just spent all this time warning the disciples about the pending persecution that will definitely come to them? To keep them from falling away. See this is a theme in our Grow series. Jesus keeps saying "I'm telling this now so that when it happens you will look back and realize I was in control of this all along." Nothing surprises Jesus. And I'm telling you this so that you won't retreat in the face of opposition.

⁴ Carson, 530

Because...verse 2...the hour IS COMING. IT'S COMING!
When you will be killed. And in fact...the people that kill you will think they are doing a Good Service to God.

- In 1532 Thomas Harding and his wife were accused of heresy by the church of England because they denied that the bread and wine turned into the actual body and blood of Christ. They were burned alive at the stake. As they were burning, the priests told the people that whoever brought wood to help burn the heretics would be given indulgences that would allow them to sin for forty days
- On Monday 84 year old French priest Jacques Hamel was executed by two men who then ran out of a church in Normandy holding guns to the heads of two nuns shouting "Allahu Akbar" or "God is Great." In the name of God they murdered a servant of God. That tragic act was foreseen by Jesus in John 16.2. it WILL come to pass.
- Christians have faced severe persecution performed in the name of Yahweh, in the name of Caesar, in the name of Allah, in the name of Marx – and sadly in the name of Jesus.⁵
- There was a woman named Vibia Perpetua who was a strong Christian living around 200 AD. In 202 the emperor of Rome ordered all Christians to be rounded up and killed. She was married to a Roman and the Roman man told her to recant to spare the life of their unborn baby. She refused saying it would

be an honor to die for the name of Christ. She had the baby, then a few weeks later they put her in the middle of the Coliseum to be gored to death by bulls. And she was so strong listen to this.

- After being gored a couple of times, she asked for a time out. Not sure how that happens.
- She & her friend Felicity stand up, fix their dresses and their hair and say "We just wanted to look our best when we meet our king." They hug each other and then the guards kill them on the spot for disrespect. That's 100% right there.

Listen to me. Here's why I tell you all these stories. Jesus is trying to prepare the disciples for something and he's getting one central point across:

The greatest danger the disciples faced in persecution was not death; it was rejecting Christ.

He's saying ITS COMING. And when it does, don't run away. He's saying see beyond it to HIM. Persecution looks big, but he is bigger. Some of you are already facing opposition for your faith. And

In fact, I want to use that to transition into answering our question from earlier. **How do you live in a world opposed to Christ?**

⁵ Carson, 531.

Here's the first answer and it gets right to what I was just talking about:

See Christ as more powerful

Beach – Jumping Waves without daddy vs with daddy. All of the sudden those big waves aren't so scary.

I know it's a bit cheesy of an analogy but the point could not be more important. What are you holding onto when the waves come? True belief is refined in the fire of suffering and persecution.

- High schooler – when everybody says why wont you smoke this? Drink this? Sleep with him? or with her? Usually people give in not because the act is desirable but because the power of the voices around them. Is God's voice in your life more powerful!? He KNEW this day was coming! When you would encounter your first opposition to your faith. And you will never trust him with your life if his voice is less powerful in your life than a few teenagers struggling to understand puberty.
- Employee – Is God's voice more powerful than your boss when he/she says you need to lie, cheat, and steal to get sales results? Do you trust God to provide for you if you do things his way? Even if it might cost you your job? He knew that day was coming!
- What do you find security in? Is it in living comfortably? Then the waves will overwhelm you. Is

it in approval of others? The waves will overwhelm you. You better stay out of the ocean. Is it in Christ? Then no wave can overtake you. St. Chrysostom said in reflecting on the opening of chapter 16: "we ought then, when about to endure anything unpleasant, to think not of the toils but of the crowns; for as merchants take into account not the seas only, but also the profits, so ought we to reckon on heaven and confidence towards God."⁶ **Let us not then be ever seeking security here, in order that we may enjoy security there;**⁷

Christ is more powerful. Are you holding on to the father so close that when opposition comes you will have something to compare it to? This looks like a big wave...but we are good. Because Jesus isn't about to get knocked around by a silly wave. In fact my analogy is inferior because in reality when you are fully resting in Christ's power you will begin to see that the opposition you face is about as powerful as a water balloon hitting the side of a mountain.

How do you live in a world opposed to Christ?

See Christ as more beautiful

⁶ St. Chrysostom. Homily LXXVII from "Homilies on the Gospel of St. John" in Volume 14 of Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers (Hendrickson, Peabody MA, 2012) 285.

⁷ Chrysostom, 285.

This may be the hardest one. I think the reason many of you do not experience any opposition for your faith may be because you've traded the beauty of Christ for the empty things of our day. You don't experience opposition from the world because you are just like the world. You value what the world values and love what the world loves so naturally you act like the world acts. It shouldn't then surprise you that you do not receive any opposition. But are you really a follower of Christ?

Is he BETTER to you than anything else? Not just bigger, but better? We talked about this last week. When you finally understand the gospel, you realize that Jesus was never after your behavior, he is after your heart. He has made you to love. He has made you to appreciate beauty. When you see a sunset over the ocean and think "wow that's beautiful..." He made you to feel that way. And he says all of that, all of the beauty in creation, that's the handiwork of a God more beautiful and more desirable than any of that. In fact that's one of the things we are trying to break through here and learn together as a church. That there is more joy and pleasure in God than in anything the world has to offer.

You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. – Psalm 16.11

He's better! That's why **I don't ever want to be a comfort-seeking, entertainment-addicted, security-craving,**

approval-desiring Christian! That's not the life God has called you to!

Like we said last week, there are two ways to fight temptation. Which is a form of opposition. You can, out of your own willpower, just fight it. Choose to do God's way. And there is merit there, but it is difficult. You are conforming to God's law against your desire. And that might work for a while. But the way to truly fight temptation is to develop a desire, an appetite if you will, for Christ.

EX: I love Oreos. Anybody else? But they aren't good for you. So how do you avoid them? Well, you can try just not eating them. In fact you can try getting them out of the house. But as soon as you say "no more oreos" you find yourself at a party serving oreos. And 2 sleeves later you are trying to figure out what happened.

There is another way to not eat oreos. Last year I did this eating challenge that forced you to eliminate all sugar for 30 days. Well, at the end of 30 days, I had detoxed from Sugar and when I looked at oreos I thought...that's going to slow me down and make me take a nap. My tastes changed. Which then changed my desires. Same thing with Christ. When you 100% give your life to Christ and trust his way, your desires for those things that used to tempt you will start to fade. It will take time. And maybe they will linger for a long time. But you will finally begin to see Christ is in

fact more beautiful and desirable than the things of this world.

How do you live in a world opposed to Christ?

Lastly

See those who oppose you as Christ sees them

Christ said “they will persecute you as they persecute me.” Why will they persecute you? He says why in a couple of places.

“But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.” John 15.21

“And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me.”

John 16.3

Why are they doing this? Because they don't know God! He's almost foreshadowing his last words up on the cross...they know not what they do! If they KNEW who I really was they'd never do this. They are blind. And Christ says on the cross with his last breath father...FORGIVE THEM! He doesn't say father destroy them. He could. But when they are taking his life away he has compassion on them. Because he realizes though his earthly life is ending, their eternal lives are doomed. And they can't see it. They are blinded. And he's so in tuned to the father's love, his response to persecution is COMPASSION! Not vengeance.

Is that your perspective on those who oppose the gospel? Who oppose the Christian message? Do you love them? Are you ready to endure ridicule? To endure suffering?

God is calling some of you to pick up your lives and move to an area of the world filled with unreached people groups. And you are going to sacrifice everything to get there and guess what...those people groups aren't going to be happy you are there. They will persecute you. Will you see them as Christ sees them?

Jim & Elizabeth Elliot

In the early 1950s Jim Elliot decided to give his life to taking the gospel to people that had never heard it. He eventually settled on the Auca Indians in Ecuador. He and his wife Elizabeth along with a team of missionaries began scouting how to reach them because nobody had ever contacted these people. On January 8, 1956 Jim Elliot was killed by the Auca Indians (now known as the Waodani people) while trying to establish contact with them.

Obviously this was a huge tragedy and it was most difficult of course on his wife Elizabeth and their 10 month old daughter. After a time of grieving, Elisabeth went back to that tribe. And stayed for two more years. And the fruit of her labor were many of the Waodani people coming to faith in Christ. In the face of the hardest persecution, she showed compassion. Because Christ was more powerful, and more beautiful, than the pain of losing her husband.

Is Christ bigger to you? Is he better? Until he is you will never see the world as God does. You will never be able to love as he does. The answer to your trial, the answer to your opposition...its Christ. Rest in the Gospel and grow into the man or woman God has created you to be.