

A scenic view of a mountain village. In the foreground, a road curves through a valley with patches of snow. A large, stone church with a tall, red-roofed spire and two clock faces is the central focus. To its right are several multi-story buildings with light-colored walls and dark roofs, some with snow on their roofs. The background features steep, rocky mountains with patches of snow and dense forests of trees with vibrant orange and yellow autumn foliage. The sky is a soft, hazy grey.

I Have Said All These Things to You to Keep You from Falling Away

The Persecution and
Perseverance of Christians

John 15:18-16:4

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Introduction

There is a lot of excitement and energy at the start of the year. We anticipate what a new year will bring, and we really do hope for the best. It's been said that young people have a lot to look forward to, and that this is just the beginning. "You have your whole lives ahead of you!" But for followers of Jesus, the future doesn't always look so bright. There is a sobering reality that comes with being a Christian. We don't deny the hardships of life. Have you already faced some disappointments at the beginning of this new year? Persecution remains a problem for Christians around the world. We're still in the middle of a spiritual war. Sin and death remain our enemies. Satan prowls around like a roaring lion. Trials still cause us trouble. Will you endure all the way until the end? How can Christians find the faith to persevere? Where can we find help when we feel like we want to give up? Where can we find hope as we face an uncertain future?

Context

In our passage today, Jesus is giving his last words to his 12 disciples before he heads to the cross. He is giving his final words to his friends, and he is telling them to love one another just as he has loved them. Jesus is going to hit them with some heavy news. He will give two sweeping statements about what the future holds for his followers. He centers on two big themes and circles around them, letting his disciples know that the themes are related. These are sobering realities that Jesus does not water down.



1. Hate and Persecution

Jesus first warns of hate and persecution for his followers. Why does the future hold hate and persecution for followers of Jesus? Let's see the reasons why the world might hate Christians.

A. The World Hates Jesus

*"If the world hates you, know that **it has hated me before it hated you.**"*
(John 15:18)

One reason why the world might hate Christians is because the world hates Jesus. At this point in Christ's life, he had already drawn the line between those who hate him and those who love him. Jesus knows that there is already a plot — a devised and secret plan — to kill him. And the reason people want to kill him is because they hate him. This hatred is not superficial, but it goes all the way down to the heart. It's a detesting, abhorring kind of hate. It's hatred that harbors ill-will towards someone so much that you want to see them dead. You want to see them killed. We call people "haters" and we say "don't hate" — but this hatred that Jesus has in mind is no joke. To hate Jesus means you want to murder him. So, the world will hate you, because the world hates Jesus. But why does the world hate Jesus so much? Earlier in the life of Christ, when Jesus was once talking to his then unsaved brothers, he said:

*The world cannot hate you, but **it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil.*** (John 7:7)

Jesus says that the works of the world are evil. He says that the world is filled with bad, wicked, criminals. He says that they do nothing good. No righteousness, no positive moral value. In fact, they are inherently of negative moral value. The world is opposed to God and his goodness, and they are of the Evil One, a title of Satan. Of course this offends the world! They can't tolerate being told the truth. Everyone who does evil hates the light for fear of being exposed (John 3:20). Jesus says that the works of the world are evil, so the world hates Jesus. If you follow Jesus, if you are his friend, then the world will hate you, too.

You might feel nervous at this point, experiencing some anxiety. You might want to push back a little bit. "Wait Jesus, your logic doesn't seem totally legit. We can be friends, but I don't need to be the one calling people evil."

I can talk about love and prayer and helping others, and I can still love the world. Didn't you tell us that God loved the world?" Let's look at Jesus' response, given to his disciples in Luke 6:26:

“Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets. (Luke 6:26)

Woe to those when people speak well of you, because this is what previous generations did to the false prophets. False prophets are spoken well of. They speak only what people want to hear — they don't tell the truth. “This is a warning against seeking the approval of the world rather than being faithful to God” (ESVSB). True believers tell the whole truth concerning Satan, sin, our Savior, and salvation. Hear what Hebrews 11:35-37 says about those who had what it takes to enter the hall of faith: “Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword.” You can see that it's very clear: You cannot be friends with the world.

Hate and persecution is coming for Christians because the world hates Jesus.

Application

I want us to pause and think through what this means for us today. Some of you are very young here. We were in Children's Worship together! But eventually, in very short years, you will be where our older youth are: standing at the cusp of college and young adulthood. You all know who Jesus is. You all know what he stands for. Our text today demands that you make a decision now about Jesus — you either love him or you hate him. To be indecisive is to refuse him. To be indifferent is to reject him. You either love him, or you hate him. Now if you love him, you know what you are getting into. The Apostle John warns us:

Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. (1 John 3:13)

Do not be surprised. Don't be caught off guard. Don't be naive. You would think that Jesus would want the world to love Christians. You would think that if you show the world the same love that Jesus does, then the world would love you back in return. But this is not how the world works. The world will see you as different. The world will see you as strange. There is going to be a cost to following Christ. But the cost is nothing when compared to the reward. Take courage, and resolve in your heart right now to never forsake your Savior. In your younger years, you can prepare for



persecution: by anchoring yourself in Scripture, practicing prayer, slaying your sin, committing to the church, and finding real friends who love Jesus. If you have not yet been baptized, see it as a sign of obedience to Christ and a public profession of your faith. I was baptized when I was in junior high. Being baptized did not make me a super-Christian. It did not mean that I was more holy or that I stopped from sinning. But it did proclaim my commitment to Christ, and it was a marker that reminded me of my indebtedness and dedication to him. Stay loyal to the Lord.

So you see that the world hates Jesus. The world hates Jesus, and Jesus gives us another reason for why the future holds hate and persecution for his followers:

B. You are Not of the World

*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.** Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. 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. Whoever hates me hates my Father also. 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. But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: **‘They hated me without a cause.’** (John 15:19-25)*

Another reason why the world might hate Christians is because Christians are not of this world. Jesus says that his disciples are not of the world, but that he chose them out of the world. Those in my Sunday School class, you learned what this word “chosen” means. It means to be picked, to be selected. This is the sovereign grace of God. Christ’s disciples are privileged to be placed out of the world. They have been separated, disassociated, set apart and set away. Christians are in the world, but not of the world. Christians are light in the darkness. The world will not listen to Christians. They might hear you and your words. But they won’t be convinced (ESVSB). They will remain fickle (ESVSB). Culture will continue to shift and sway on their views of Christ and Christians. 1 John 4:5-6 says of unbelievers: “They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever

is not from God does not listen to us.” You cannot finally succeed at being friends with the world. In fact, anyone who continues to befriend the world is basically making the world into an idol. It’s akin to adultery. Hear what James 4:4 says: “You *adulterous* people! Do you not know that *friendship* with the world is *enmity* with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a *friend* of the world makes himself an *enemy* of God.”

In verse 20 of our passage, Jesus goes on to say that a servant is not greater than his master, and he’s repeating his words from John 13:16. This example is easy to understand. Jesus first said this in relation to washing his disciples’ feet. He said that if he, the master, were to wash his disciples’ feet, they were to follow his example. And if they were to continue following his example, then of course the world will hate them — because they hate the source. If you hate the leader, you’re going to hate his followers. In Kevin’s sermon from two weeks ago, Jesus made an astonishing statement by calling us his friends (John 15:15). It is an incredible privilege to be called a friend of God. But it is also increasingly dangerous as the world refuses to tolerate anyone in camaraderie with Christ. And Jesus gets more real: He says not only are they going to hate you, but they’re going to persecute you. They are going to harass you. They are going to oppress you. They are going to chase and pursue you, they’re going to put pressure on you. In case you’re thinking that this is just Jesus being dramatic — the Apostle Paul, someone who knows persecution, straight up says in 2 Timothy 3:12: “Indeed, *all* who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be *persecuted*.”

Now in verse 21 of our passage, Jesus continues again, saying that the world is going to persecute you on account of his name — meaning, because of who he is — and he pushes it further by saying they do not know God the Father — the one who sent Jesus as a Savior. Jesus makes it clear in verse 23, saying whoever hates him hates God the Father. Throughout his whole ministry, he has been making himself *equal* with God. He has been called the Lamb of *God*. He has been called the Son of *God*. Jesus *is* God. To say you hate *Jesus* is to say you hate *God*. In verses 22 and 24, Jesus says that if he did not share his words and works with the world, his teachings and his miracles, then the world might have an excuse not to know him as the Son of God. But because Christ has arrived, the world has reached a decision. Jesus is the free healing cure for the failing human heart — yet the world refuses to receive. Jesus is free food for every starving soul — yet the world refuses to taste and see. The world hates Jesus, and it is a sin to hate the Son of God. Our Savior is not surprised. Christ is not caught off guard. In verse 25, he says that their hatred had been foretold of before:

*More in number than the hairs of my head are those who **hate me without cause**; mighty are those who would destroy me, those who attack me with lies. What I did not steal must I now restore? (Psalm 69:4)*

Jesus is referring to Psalm 69:4, a Psalm that was originally written by David but finds furthering and fulfillment in Christ. Hated without cause. Attacked with lies. David, a man after God's own heart, was hated for being a part of God's people. David was not perfect. David was still sinful. But Jesus was sinless. There was no guilt to be found in him. So the world really did have no reason to hate him except to reveal the sinful disposition of their hearts. Isaiah 6:9-10 says it best:

*And he said, "Go, and say to this people: '**Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.**'" (Isaiah 6:9)*

The world hears but does not understand, they see but they do not perceive. Their hearts are dull, their ears are heavy. Stiff-necks. Blind eyes. The world hates Jesus, and the future holds hate and persecution for his followers because his followers are not of this world.

Application

Let's take a break and consider what it really means to be called out of this world. Some of you have claimed to be Christian, but you still seem to be at home in this world. Maybe you neglect coming to Sunday School or Friday night fellowships. Maybe you waste your days away playing video games. Maybe you feel empty unless you're constantly entertained with shows or movies. Maybe you feel insecure and freak out unless you're followed and viewed on social media. Maybe you put all of your hopes and dreams in academics, sports, or music. You have become a bit too comfortable in this world. Jesus gives us a word of warning for Christians who have made an idol out of ease:

*"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. **For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**" (Matthew 16:19-21)*

What you treasure, what you hold on to in this life, reveals where your heart is. Christians are called to cherish Christ above all. Your treasures on this earth will be destroyed. Your academic achievements, your success in sports, your magnificence in music. Does this describe you? You can put all of your hopes and dreams in a college or a career, but you leave Christ out of the equation.

You can put all of our time and energy in pursuing wealth and relationships, but you leave the Lord with your leftovers. You can center your life around comfort and safety, but you forget about the Kingdom and your calling. You search for acceptance by accumulating friends and followers, but forget that Jesus is already unashamed of you. This world is not your home. Anchor yourself in Heaven, and find your home in Jesus. The first promise that Jesus gives is that of hate and persecution for his followers. This was the warning, the bad news. Let's get to the good news.



2. Help and Perseverance

The second point is a promise that Jesus gives his disciples: help is coming and they will persevere. This is the good news: The Holy Spirit will come, sent to help believers, and believers will be kept from falling away. How exactly will this help and perseverance happen?

A. The Holy Spirit Bears Witness About Jesus

*“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.** And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning (John 15:26-27)*

The Holy Spirit, the Helper, is going to bear witness about Jesus. The Spirit is going to *testify*, he’s going to give his *testimony* about Jesus. He’s going to commend, speak well of, and vouch for Jesus. When I talk about “testimony” here, don’t think about a church retreat or a church camp where you go up and talk if you feel like it or if you want to do it. Think about the word “testimony” here like a courtroom testimony. The Holy Spirit is being summoned and called upon to speak truth — to bear witness — about Jesus. And the Holy Spirit doesn’t say what he feels or what he thinks — he speaks of what is true. The Holy Spirit really is the Spirit of truth. He is compelled and sure to speak the truth about Jesus. And he testifies to those who approach the throne of God with humble, broken, and contrite hearts. He speaks to those who submit to the King. He tells the truth about God to those who want to spend time with him. There is a certain type of inner conviction that comes from personal intimacy with Christ (Barclay). The Holy Spirit helps you know that God is real, his Word is true, and Jesus really does love you:

*And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. **You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.** (John 14:16-17)*

In verse 27 of our passage, Jesus takes the idea of the Spirit bearing witness even further by saying that his followers will also bear witness, they will also testify and speak the truth about him. This is a small part of the passage and it’s easy to miss. It’s tucked underneath the idea of being kept from falling away and being helped by the Spirit. You can see how it relates to what Jesus is saying: The Holy Spirit *testifies* of Christ in the hearts of *believers*, and believers *testify* of Christ to the hearts of *unbelievers*. So there is an *inward*

testimony to us from the Spirit, and there is an *outward* testimony from us to the unbelieving world. “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 4:6) Jesus’ followers aren’t just going to say that he was an interesting guy. They’re not going to say that he was a great leader, philosopher, or thinker. Jesus is not someone you meet one day and forget about the next. There is nobody in the world like Jesus! “No one ever spoke like this man!” (John 7:46). His words were unforgettable. His character was undeniable. His grace was inconceivable. His wisdom was inexhaustible. His beauty, not his outward beauty, but the beauty of who he is, was indescribable. His followers bear witness to the fact that Jesus is the Son of God, and the Savior of the world:

*And we have seen and testify that **the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.** (1 John 4:14)*

The Holy Spirit bears witness about Jesus, and believers will in turn bear witness to others.

Application

Now wait a minute — how can any of us say that we have *seen* Jesus? Maybe this works for the original apostles, but how can Jesus expect us here today to witness for him if we haven’t really *seen* him? Paul writes in Ephesians 3:4:

“When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ.” (Ephesians 3:4)

Seeing comes through reading. God says that reading is seeing. Have you truly seen Jesus? Have you seen him for who he is, and do you know him well enough that you can bear witness about him? That you can testify and tell others about him? Maybe you’ve been coming to church for your entire life, and if you’re honest with yourself, you have never truly encountered Jesus. I humbly suggest that you have not been emphasizing the Word. And here’s another way that you can be sure if you have really seen Jesus: Acts 4:20 says “for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.” Scripture says that if you have truly seen Jesus, you cannot help but speak about him. You can’t keep it to yourself. You can’t keep it in. Maybe you need to start practicing sharing the Gospel. One way to begin is by just speaking the truth to others in your small group. For those in my Sunday School class, you know that we’ll sometimes go around and share and I’ll sometimes ask you questions for you to answer. This is something I learned in school, and it’s



exercising your speech. It's giving you practice in articulating the truth. It's giving you the vocabulary of the Bible. It's training your tongue in the sharing of Scripture. We read, we see, we speak.

In times of persecution, help comes as The Holy Spirit testifies to us about Jesus, and believers will in turn testify to others. You'll find next that Jesus says you will persevere. Your faith will persevere until the end:

B. You Will Be Kept from Falling Away

What's written next are some choice words from Christ, specific and to the point but not with indifference or a lack of care: Jesus keeps his disciples. True believers cannot fall away. Their salvation is secure, but they're going to endure a lot of trials to test their faith. And they will endure all the way until the end. These are violent words:

"I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away.

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. And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you. (John 16:1-4)

Again, in case you think that Jesus is being overly dramatic, I present to you the life of the Apostle Paul. Before he was converted to Christ, Paul was the chief prosecutor of the church. Paul took pleasure in killing Christians. He was said to be "*breathing threats and murder* against the disciples of the Lord." (Acts 9:1). Paul was a Jewish man. He knew about God the Father. But he did not believe that Jesus was the Son of God. He saw Jesus as a liar. He saw Jesus as a blasphemer. So he hated Christians. He hated followers of Christ. He thought he was being righteous, he believed he was doing what God wanted — by hating, persecuting, and murdering Christians. He was sure he was offering service to God. Look at what Paul says about his previous life in the book of Acts. This is awfully scary:

*"I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them **I persecuted them** even to foreign cities. (Acts 26:9-11)*

Persecution is going to come from people who think they are right. They think they know what it means to be a good person, they think they know what it means to live a moral life. They'll say things like "If you love me, let me be who I am. Don't tell me what to do with my choices and my lifestyle." They will redefine sin, with the sense of having the moral high ground. But they don't really know God. They don't truly know Jesus. Jesus set Paul straight on the Damascus road, when he appeared to Paul in the form of an epiphany. Paul fell down to the ground, scared and humbled, but ultimately saved and healed to believe in Jesus. This is our hope for those who don't know Christ. We pray for those who persecute us.

In our passage today, Jesus is giving his followers a warning in advance so they know what they are going to be up against. He wants them to brace themselves, he wants them to say "Yes, Jesus said that this would happen to us." And Jesus isn't doing this in an "I told you so" sort of way – he's doing it as someone who wants them to succeed, who wants them to win. He wants his disciples to remember his words, and to trust him. To believe him. To have faith in him. If you are anxious about your life, you can find peace knowing that nothing happens to you outside of God's sovereign plans. If you are scared about your circumstances, know that your soul is safe and God is governing every situation for your sanctification. If you are worried about the future, know that God is working all things together for the good of those who love him. On this side of the cross, we know that we have the Holy Spirit to empower us as we persevere. For starters, the Holy Spirit seals us. Ephesians 1:13 says:

*"When you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were **sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.**"*
(Ephesians 1:13)

This means that you are marked as authentic children of God, with his authority to keep us as his own (TGC). The Holy Spirit is absolutely crucial to keep us from falling away. The Holy Spirit is instrumental in our endurance. For Christians to be kicked out of the synagogues and for Christians to be killed would require nothing less than reliance on the Holy Spirit's help with perseverance.

Application

Let's stop one last time and think about what it meant for Jesus' disciples to be put out of the synagogues. For many of them, the synagogue was where they found their identity. It was where they were represented in the world.

It was where they could celebrate their background, culture, and heritage. It was where they were accepted and safe. They had family and friends there. But Jesus says that they would soon be put out — expelled, and rejected from the place that they called home. If you are a Christian here today, I want to give you some encouragement: There is a special and certain type of honor for those who suffer shame for the name of Jesus. Look at Acts 5:40:

*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. Then they left the presence of the council, **rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.** And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus. (Acts 5:40)*

For those of us who are Asian American, we understand what it means to be in an honor/shame culture. And if we look closely at our culture, especially with Chinese New Year here, we see how our culture clashes with the Kingdom of Jesus. There are some who really do have to reject the beliefs and customs of their culture, even forsaking family and friends, after they are born again.

It is a privilege and honor to join the ranks of these great saints who have suffered dishonor for the name of Jesus. To be counted worthy to suffer for the sake of Christ is commendable, respectable, and inspiring. You can be sure that Jesus sees your suffering. He is aware of it and you are not alone. He is not scared and he does not shrink away from it. He has given you the Church to come alongside you for encouragement and support. He will answer your prayers for perseverance. God will give you the strength to serve him in suffering.

So let's demonstrate Christian solidarity together at school. When you see someone at school who you know here from church — say hi to each other, hang out with each other, hug each other. And when your friends ask how you know each other, tell them that's my brother in Christ. That's my sister in Christ. And then invite your friend to come to church. You all have friends and family who do not come to church. It's still culturally acceptable to invite people to come out on a Sunday morning. Keep persisting. Keep insisting. Put a little bit of your reputation at risk and your like-ability on the line. Be courageous for Christ.

It is not foolish to be jealous for the fame of Jesus. This reminds us to pray for all of the Christians who suffer real persecution around the world. My family prays for missionaries on Mondays, but after preaching this passage, I'm convicted to pray for the martyrs, too. You must share the work of spreading the Gospel and expanding the Kingdom. Live your life proclaiming Christ.



Big Idea

Jesus gives a warning and a promise in his final words to his disciples. The first point, the warning that Jesus gives, is the bad news, and it's that of hate and persecution for his followers. To put it bluntly: Believers will be persecuted on behalf of Christ. The second point, the promise that Jesus gives, is the good news, and it's that help is coming and that they will persevere. Said more specifically: the Holy Spirit will come, sent to help believers, and believers will be kept from falling away. Here is our big idea for today: Christians will endure hatred and persecution with help from the Holy Spirit and persevering until the end.

The Westminster Confession, a Christian creed that we believe, says in Chapter 17, Of the Perseverance of the Saints: They, whom God hath accepted in His beloved, effectually called and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace; but shall certainly **persevere** therein to the end, and be eternally saved.

And here's some scriptural support from 2 Timothy:

*The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we **endure**, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself. (2 Timothy 2:11-13)*

With all of this in mind, here's another way to restate our big idea, more broadly and with a beat: With help from God and sovereign grace, you will endure and keep the faith.

Gospel

Now I want to be very clear about this: Nowhere in the Bible does it say that Christians are to retaliate, to return persecution with violence. You are to remain steadfast and stand firm on the solid ground of Jesus. You do not need to fight back. Peter was told to put away his sword in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:52). You do not need to stand up for Jesus with physical strength. Our strength is spiritual. It is supernatural. It is peace and joy in the face of persecution. "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

To take it further, look at Jesus' example on the cross. He says in Luke 23:34: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' And they cast lots to divide his garments." In the greatest persecution imaginable, in the biggest instance of disrespect that ever occurred in human history, Jesus is forgiving. He doesn't send down legions of angels. He doesn't come down from the cross himself and take matters into his own hands. These soldiers were playing a game with God's garments, they were playing a game for keeps with the clothes of Christ, and Jesus just treats them like kids who don't know any better. It's unbelievably kind. It's appallingly gracious. It's such a thing that only Jesus would do. And the reason he did this was to lovingly be a living sacrifice for our sins:

*He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so He did not open His mouth. By oppression and judgment He was taken away, and who can recount His descendants? For He was cut off from the land of the living; **He was stricken for the transgression of My people.** (Isaiah 53:7-8)*

Christians do not fight when they are persecuted because we have the example of Jesus. The Gospel message is that Jesus Christ was mistreated for us. He took the punishment for our sin, and he did not fight back. He willingly went to the cross to kill your sin, and by his resurrection you are forgiven, and you can have eternal life with him. I am calling you now to repent — confess your sins and turn towards God. Wake up and come out of the grave. Believe and be forgiven. Find true rest and new life in Christ. If God has moved your heart in any way today, come meet me after the service so I can pray with you.



Application Questions

I've already given you several applications throughout the sermon. I'll rephrase them for you as application questions.

Let's start here: What parts of your life have you not yet surrendered to Christ? Are there certain sins that you have yet to confess and repent of? Maybe there are certain shows that you know are sinful but you are unwilling to stop watching. Maybe there are sins of sexual immorality in your life that you want to keep secret. Are you anxious and worried about your grades and college, refusing to give it to God, unable to rest and trust his plans for you? Have you obeyed God in baptism? If not, why not? Search your hearts, confess your sins. See where you have not surrendered to him, and let him have all of your life.

Next, ask yourself: in what areas of your life are you still living in the world? Maybe you're a Sunday Christian. You'll go to church on Sundays, but the rest of the week you're living just like everybody else. Maybe you have friends that are holding you back from being faithful to God. Maybe it's the way you talk — your words and speech sound like the world with cussing and coarse joking, or spreading gossip and slander. You should look and speak and live and think differently than the rest of the world. Christ has called us out. Live a new life and don't look back.

Then: Can you honestly say that you have seen Jesus and can tell others about him? Are you spending time with Jesus in the Bible? Here's an idea for a Bible reading plan. Focus on the Gospels this year. For the month of January, read Matthew. Just spend as much time as you can reading through it. Then in February, start Mark. Then in March, go to Luke. And in April, begin with John. In the month of May, go back to Matthew. As you're reading, make it a priority to practice telling others about it. Share in your small group. Seek out opportunities and don't shy away from talking about your spiritual life. Make this year a truly Gospel-centered, Gospel-saturated year. Spend time with Jesus by reading his Word. When it's time to tell others about him, you'll have so much to share.

Finally: How can you encourage Christians who have been "kicked out of the synagogues"? Will you pray for the persecuted church? Do you know anyone who has suffered shame for the sake of Christ? Maybe you have a friend, and their parents or siblings aren't saved. Maybe you know someone who is trying to take a stronger stand for Christ and has been losing some of their friends along the way. Maybe you know someone who just broke up with

their significant other for the sake of honoring Christ. Whatever the case, this isolation can be incredibly lonely. Can you encourage them with prayer, or by keeping in touch, or by being a better friend at church or at school? Come alongside your brothers and sisters and spur them on. Keep reaching out to your unsaved family and friends. Don't be afraid to be awkward. God does not give up on us so we do not give up on others. With warmth, and with wisdom, be persistent and insistent in your evangelism. Invite others to church, ask how you can pray for them, share the Good News.

Conclusion

Let's go back to the beginning again: It's true that for followers of Jesus, our immediate future doesn't always look so bright. Christians can find the faith to persevere. You can find help when you feel like you want to give up. You can find hope as you face an uncertain future. You're just not looking far enough into a secure and promised salvation:

*But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and **you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.** (Hebrews 10:32-34)*

These beloved saints in the book of Hebrews found endurance by looking towards eternity. They did not get discouraged by their current situations. They were not put off by their present problems. They persevered in persecution. They endured a hard struggle with sufferings, they were publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and they joyfully accepted the plundering of their property. Did you hear that? They joyfully accepted the plundering of their property. When their stuff was stolen, they greeted it with gladness. How could they do this? How was this possible? They joyfully accepted the plundering of their property, since they knew that they themselves had a better possession and an abiding one. They knew that God and salvation, Jesus and Heaven were greater than anything and everything else. Nothing could compare. You have been born again to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you (1 Peter 1:4). No more sin, no more death, no more pain, and no more suffering. For believers, this is our biggest, best, and brightest future: to be at home in glory with God in Heaven, experiencing eternal and everlasting joy

with Jesus. The presence of his glory with great joy. I repeat the words of our Savior as I preach to you today: I said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. With help from God and sovereign grace, you will endure and keep the faith. This is just the beginning. And we'll have a lot more to look forward to together.

*Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before **the presence of his glory with great joy**, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24–25)*



A Warning and a Promise

A warning and a promise
To those who bear the cross:
That when the night is coming
Our joy comes with the dawn.

Our sins have been forgiven
Our souls have been set free!
In trials and in testing
We have all that we need.

For just as Christ has suffered
So we must suffer too.
With hate and persecution
They know not what they do.

But as the Spirit seals us
And we recall his words,
We see the Son in glory
And hope for his return.

With help from God almighty
And surely sovereign grace,
We will endure to Heaven
Hold on and keep the faith!

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Appendix 1: Objections

There are a couple of objections you may have in response to our message today. Here's an initial objection. You might be saying: "I'm young and I can worry about hate and persecution later in life. This is just all too serious." To this, I would say that yes you are young, but it is not guaranteed that you will have a long life to live. We don't know what today or tomorrow will bring. God requires your allegiance to him now. And I do not believe that this is all too serious. Hate and persecution is happening all over the world, and it is arrogant and selfish to think that it is "too serious" just because this message might not apply to you right now. The gate to eternal life is narrow, and youth must also strive to enter it. I'm here to help you. And isn't this the point that Jesus makes to his disciples anyways — that hate and persecution is coming? If it is not already happening to you, the time to prepare is now.

Another objection would be that if Jesus says he's going to keep us from falling away, how is it that some Christians seem to lose their faith? How is it that even Judas, one of the twelve who was present when Jesus was talking in our passage, betrayed him in the end? The answer is that Jesus only keeps those who are truly his. Earlier in John 15:14, Jesus said: "You are my friends if you do what I command you." So Christ's ability to keep people is not a blanket statement to cover everyone. It comes with the terms and conditions that you are an actual, genuine, real-life Christian. Furthermore, those who are not Christians do not have the Holy Spirit. They do not have the Holy Spirit's supernatural power to be kept and sealed. They are without a witness to testify of Christ in their life. And the example of Judas actually proves the point that there are many who can hang around Jesus, experience the benefits of his presence, even doing ministry with him, and still not truly believe and have saving faith in their hearts. This is a warning for all of us to check ourselves to see if our faith is authentic. If it is, we can be assured that Christ's promise to keep really does apply to us.

A final objection would be that it's easy for me, Aaron, to say these things to you. "You're an old guy. You've already experienced life. But it's not fair for you to come here and say that us young people, those of us who have our whole lives ahead of us, to accept the bad news of hate and persecution." So you can choose to ignore me. You can turn me off and shut me out. But if I may speak honestly with you: For me, the truth is that yes I am older than you. But I still appreciate the difficulty of the decision to accept the bad news of hate and persecution. I find that in some ways, it is actually harder for my heart to accept these truths. The pull of falling in love with the world is one that we must continually put to death. To turn a blind eye to the bad news of hate and persecution is even more dangerous. The good news of help and preservation only comes after the bad news of hate and persecution. This is the way of the cross. This is the path that God has planned for his children. We can accept the hard truths that God gives us, and trust that his ways are the best for his glory and our good.

Appendix 2: How the Holy Spirit Helps Us Persevere

Let me give you several more verses so I can convince you about the role of the Holy Spirit in preserving us. Galatians 5:16-18 says that we must "walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh." This means that the Holy Spirit keeps us from stumbling back into our sinful nature. Back in John 14:26, we recall that "The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." This means that it is the Holy Spirit who helps us understand and recall Scripture for our progressive sanctification and ultimate salvation. 2 Corinthians 13:14 says that "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." This means that we have commune with God through the Holy Spirit — we stay connected and communicate with him for our own safekeeping. Romans 15:13 says: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope." This means that the Holy Spirit gives us hope to keep believing while being filled with the joy and peace of God.

Appendix 3: Five Memory Verses for Peace and Joy in Persecution

“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33).

“When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure.” (1 Corinthians 4:12)

We are “persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.” (2 Corinthians 4:9)

“I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name’s sake, and you have not grown weary.” (Revelation 2:3)

“You will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. (Matthew 10:22)

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