

Words of Warning and Hope

John 16:1-7

Turn in your Bibles to John 16...

"I've got good news and bad news." How many times have we heard that from someone say that? And why did they put it that way? They were meaning to soften the blow of the bad news, right?. "Yes, *there's bad news, BUT THERE'S ALSO GOOD NEWS!*" Jesus had waited until these final visceral moments with His disciples to reveal certain truths to them. I always feel the need to remind folks that John 13-16 is one long conversation. It's easy to lose sight of that when the previous 12 chapters span Jesus' entire earthly ministry, from His baptism to the Last Supper. John's pace slows dramatically, as if savoring each and every moment of this final gathering of Jesus with His disciples before His crucifixion. **"Serve one another,"** He said. **"Love one another as I have loved you,"** He told them. "I'm going away." Their hearts broke. "The world will hate you." It's somber stuff, and we haven't even looked at what's coming in today's passage, but even amidst such dismal news, we'll find that there's still hope and encouragement to be had. So, picking up in verse one, Jesus said...

John 16:1-7

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.

I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. 5 But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, Where are you going? 6 But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. 7 Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.

Jesus had saved this difficult conversation for these intimate moments with His disciples. **"I'm going away... Where I am going you cannot come... The world hates you... They will persecute you..."** The disciples had no idea what was coming. Not even their worst nightmares could've come close. Jesus had to tell them what was coming lest they "fall away," which is the Greek word *skandalizō*, from which we get our word *scandalize*. In the context of John's gospel it means *to trip up* the disciples or *to cause them to stumble*. Jesus sought to prepare them by telling them about the persecution in advance.

While forewarning can induce dread, it almost always makes us more prepared for the actual situation when it comes. It's playing out a difficult conversation you have to have with someone in your head, trying to anticipate all the ways it could go badly so you're not caught off guard. It's the basketball player running suicides and then shooting free throws with his heart pounding and hands shaking so the

adrenaline and hype of the game in a packed house isn't unfamiliar. It's attempting to acclimate yourself to an upcoming, physically uncomfortable situation (like being in a tight space for an extended amount of time) by spending time sitting or standing in a tight space.

When I ran track in high school, I found it novel that the track coach trained our hurdlers HOW TO FALL properly. Our natural, UNTRAINED reaction when we fall forward is to what? STRETCH OUT OUR ARMS, which is why injuries from Falling On Outstretched Hands is the second most common sports injury there is. Athletes across a spectrum of sports could benefit from being trained to FALL WITHOUT INJURY, but just as with life in general, it seems that coaches and players DON'T EXPECT THERE TO BE FALLS. Athletes are going to fall, people from all walks of life are going to suffer in this sin-broken world, and believers are going to be persecuted, and the difference between it being a catastrophe and a catalyst for growth is our EXPECTATION of it.

Such advance preparation mentally and physically equips you to face inevitable challenges and hardships. But what do we tend to do? We AVOID suffering and hardship at every turn! Why would we expose ourselves to trouble ahead of time, potentially needlessly? We usually don't, but we should. I'm not telling you to lock yourself in a closet to simulate being imprisoned for your faith, though you could! My point in all of this (and I believe it's JESUS' POINT) is to THINK ABOUT IT. ALLOW YOURSELF TO IMAGINE what it would be like for your life to be struck by the unthinkable. Those terrible thoughts naturally come into our minds, and we just as naturally dismiss them. We change the channel in our brains. There's the pain associated with the particular hardship itself, and then there's the fear that asks, *"Lord, am I having this thought because I'm about to go through this?"* Everything in us TURNS AWAY from the notion, and we assume that somehow, if and when the trial comes upon us, we'll suffer well, but will we? *"Will I?"* How can I without truly considering the very real possibility? Yes, the Holy Spirit will give us the power and grace and peace to endure persecution in the moment, but Jesus told His followers about the persecution to come in order to PREPARE them. Let your mind go there, and let God's Spirit prepare your heart. Jesus told the disciples...

John 16:2

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.

Now we get to it. Now we get SPECIFIC, and we get PERSONAL. You see, previously Jesus had just said that "the world" would hate His followers, referring to those impersonal systems that are operated by the demonic forces and ruled over by the devil himself to keep this present reality under his sway. We know it's there because the Bible tells us that **"we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places"** (Ephesians 6:12). Incidentally, that's the theme of VBS this June; SHAMELESS PLUG there. The Bible tells us that this world is not our home, that we're STRANGERS and FOREIGNERS in it, citizens OF ANOTHER WORLD and therefore UNWELCOME in this one. Now, if we keep our heads down and attempt to be "covert Christians," never really taking any stand for Jesus, then the hatred of the world will likely never manifest as targeted persecution in our

lives. However, as Tim taught last week, if we're surrendering to the Holy Spirit, we'll be compelled to be Jesus' witnesses. We won't be able to help it, and the world's hatred will find us and afflict our lives through people with faces and names we know. Is Jesus WORTHY of suffering for? HE IS.

Jesus tells His Jewish followers that they'll be put out of the synagogue, which resembled our local churches in many ways. Worship consisted of meeting on a prescribed day of the week, Saturday in their case, and they would read God's Word and teach from it. Jesus regularly attended synagogue and even participated in the reading and teaching of Scripture (Luke 4:16-21). Likewise, Paul and other apostles would seek out synagogues as they traveled on missionary journeys, using them as a platform for launching ministry in various places (Acts 14:1; 18:4,8).

Being kicked out the synagogue meant a couple of things. Since the synagogue was the HUB of the Jewish community, being kicked out of the synagogue meant being DISFELLOWSHIPED from the community. Either out of sheer contempt for you, or out of fear of being disfellowshipped themselves for sympathizing with you, Jews in the community would've been less likely to do business with you, neither hiring you for work, buying your product, or selling to you. Your livelihood was ruined, and if you had a family, they suffered as well because they too were cut off from the means of getting what they needed. Such alienation sounds like the Covid vaccine and mask mandates, right? The threat of losing one's job for not taking the jab or not being allowed to enter a store without a mask gave us a taste of what persecution will eventually look like for KNOWN CHRIST-FOLLOWERS. You say, *"That's alarmist rhetoric,"* or here's a good one. *"That's a DOG-WHISTLE for rallying the conservative Christian base."* No, it's actually HISTORY. Why do you think Christians like Barnabas in Acts 4 were selling their property and bringing the proceeds to the Apostles? They did it so they could be **"distributed to each as any had need" (Acts 4:35b)**, need CAUSED BY being kicked out of the synagogue and losing everything! And, no, that isn't socialism, it's CHARITY; it's EFFECTUAL CONCERN for your brother or sister in Christ. Their community, and even their family, had cut them off for following Christ, but here's the thing. THEY KNEW IT WOULD HAPPEN, and yet they still counted Jesus WORTHY of being followed, no matter the cost. So, you see, it isn't inappropriate to compare the cruel, life-changing Covid mandates to the persecution coming to sold-out followers of Christ BECAUSE IT'S ALREADY HAPPENED. When it happens AGAIN, will you be like those first-century Christians who were willing to lose everything for Jesus, looking for ways to support one another as the Lord has blessed you, or will the rationales we heard and maybe even used at the height of the Covid pandemic get repurposed as justification for renouncing Jesus?

The more you and I bear witness of Jesus with our lives and our message, the more the world will seek to remove our means of survival, censor our message in the marketplace of ideas, and ultimately take our lives. Now, under Roman rule, conquered nations like the Jews were not permitted to carry out capital punishment. If they did, it was a LYNCHING, an execution that was NOT state-sanctioned. This is what happened with Stephen, the first Christian martyr. In a moment of uncontrolled rage, the Sanhedrin simply drug the young preacher outside the city and stoned him to death. We'll come back to that scene in a moment. Hostile Jewish NON-Christians DID have a way of INDIRECTLY executing Jewish converts to Christianity. You see, Jews got to keep practicing their religion under Roman rule because it

was established long before the Empire, and being able to hold on to continue practicing their religion helped keep conquered nations placated. Jews who were hostile toward their fellow countrymen who had converted to Christianity could betray them to Roman authorities, "outing them" as non-Jews and leaving them with no legal exemption from EMPEROR WORSHIP, and thus making it difficult for them to prove their loyalty to the Roman Empire when they only bowed the knee to Jesus. It was the whole "enemy of my enemy is my friend" kind of situation. That's pretty WICKED, but there was a TWISTEDNESS to it as well. Jesus said that...

John 16:2b

...the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God.

This was Saul. Remember, I told you we'd come back to Stephen's execution. Before Paul gave his life to Jesus, he was known as Saul, and he violently persecuted the saints. As he gave testimony of how the Lord had changed his life, he began by describing his former way of life, saying...

Acts 22:3

I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being ZEALOUS FOR GOD as all of you are this day.

It was in their ZEAL for God that this mob of Jews were seeking to kill Paul, just as Jesus foretold. As Paul later gave testimony before King Agrippa, he shared about his zealous persecution of the Way before he was saved. He said...

Acts 26:9-11

9 I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 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. 11 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.

People have compared the zeal of Saul to that of Eleazar's son Phinehas when the nation of Israel committed immorality with the daughters of Moab and began worshipping their gods. The psalmist recounts the events also recorded Numbers 25, saying...

Psalm 106:28-31

**28 Then they yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor,
and ate sacrifices offered to the dead;
29 they provoked the Lord to anger with their deeds,
and a plague broke out among them.
30 Then Phinehas stood up and INTERVENED,
and the plague was stayed.**

31 And that was counted to him as righteousness from generation to generation forever.

Phinehas INTERVENED! As such historic scenes of Israel's waywardness and the subsequent outpouring of God's wrath ran through Saul's mind, he likely felt *HE* had to intervene...

To Saul, it looked like history was repeating itself, and he couldn't allow his people to indulge in false worship and incite God's wrath upon them again. The difference between Saul and Phinehas is that PHINEHAS WAS RIGHT to execute such swift judgment, and afterward, the Lord gave Phinehas His covenant of peace (Numbers 25:11-12). How was Saul so blind? How could those who eventually sought to execute him after his conversion be so blind?! On that somber Passover evening, Jesus told His followers...

John 16:3

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

Again, Paul bears witness to this in his own life when he wrote...

1 Timothy 1:12-13

12 I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, 13 though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief,

Like Paul, most of the Jews of his day didn't recognize the God they claimed to serve when He was standing right in front of them! They didn't see the God who fed them with manna from heaven in the wilderness as He fed them loaves and fish on a hillside in Bethsaida. They didn't see the God who fiercely punished His own people with plagues for their waywardness when He stood in the Temple and overturned their tables because they had made His house a den of thieves. They heard His teaching and saw His divine power! WHY DIDN'T THEY RECOGNIZE GOD??? Because He wasn't THEIR God. They had invented a VERSION of God in their heads, a caricature of Him, ridiculously exaggerating certain characteristics to the point that they completely occluded others, and THIS IS WHAT'S HAPPENED TODAY IN MUCH OF SO-CALLED CHRISTENDOM. Paul warned the church...

Colossians 2:8

See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

Sadly, the world, buy in large, has had a greater impact on the Church than the Church has had on the world, and as a result, the image of the Son has been distorted from one that forgives sin (because you stand condemned in your sin otherwise) to one who endorses it, from One who is THE TRUTH to One who encourages you to "Live your own truth." For these modern-day Pharisees of mainstream "Christianity" (and I use that term lightly), the message of the gospel has been replaced with the

message of "social justice" to the glory of the god of INCLUSION. As a result, the Jesus of the Bible is completely unrecognizable to so-called "Christians" who have greater allegiance to a leftist political party than to the Lamb that they claim BOUGHT them, and it's these modern-day Pharisees, like Saul in the first century, who will seek to destroy us in service to the god they've invented. This is a sober warning, **"but"** hope is coming. Jesus said...

John 16:4a

But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you.

Jesus' words harken back to the Old Testament prophets who were especially assured of the God they followed because of His ability to foretell what was to come. In Isaiah, the Lord says...

Isaiah 44:7

Who is like me? Let him proclaim it.

**Let him declare and set it before me,
since I appointed an ancient people.**

Let them declare what is to come, and what will happen.

God sits enthroned outside of time; only HE reveals what is to come. When Jesus told them that such persecution would come, and that they would remember that He had told them about them in advance, He was CLAIMING TO BE GOD. Don't ever tell me that Jesus didn't claim to be God. HE DID, HE IS, and HE PROVED IT. When persecution came so fiercely that it threatened to cause them to fall away, not only would they NOT fall away, but they would also be REAFFIRMED in the knowledge that JESUS IS GOD.

I get it, though. We aren't talking about being reaffirmed in following Jesus after merely being beaten or imprisoned for it. We're talking about being reaffirmed in following Jesus after brothers and sisters are killed for following Him and knowing WE'RE NEXT. The Apostles faced this with the martyrdom of Stephen. Peter faced it when Herod put James, one of the twelve, to death with the sword, and HE WAS NEXT IN LINE! One by one, they watched their brothers and sisters be killed, but each time, as gut-wrenching as it was, they heard the prophetic words of Jesus ringing in their ears, **"when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you."** None of the persecution faced by the Church in the first century caught the Lord off guard, and neither will the persecution that we will face as we bear witness of Him. And because Jesus has told us about it ahead of time, not only will it NOT cause us to fall away, but it will remind us that the One we're following is God. WE CHOSE RIGHT! We have confidence in that!

JESUS IS GOD. We were made to know, love, and obey Him. If you've called on Him in repentance and faith, HE HAS SAVED YOU from sin's power now and its punishment later. HE IS WORTHY of our lives, and even in the midst of suffering for His Name's sake, there's more peace and joy than there is without the suffering AND HIS PRESENCE in our lives. If these are NOT CORE CONVICTIONS OF YOUR LIFE, you

will LIKELY FALL AWAY when SUFFERING THAT'S COMMON TO MAN touches you, and you will CERTAINLY FALL AWAY when PERSECUTION that's unique to the saints VIOLENTLY FALLS upon you.

IS HE WORTHY? Is He worthy of your trust and obedience and the persecution those will bring? The OBJECTIVELY TRUE ANSWER to that question is YES, but still, you must answer it for yourself. WHEN you find that He is, LIVE FOR HIM REGARDLESS OF THE COST!!! Jesus prepared the disciples' hearts so that, when persecution came, they wouldn't fall away; their hearts would be REAFFIRMED that the One who told them it was coming was GOD. HE IS the WAY, the TRUTH, and the LIFE! They chose right!!! Jesus said...

John 16:4b

I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you.

Jesus' presence had shielded them from persecution for the years they had followed Him. After He was gone, they would be His body on Earth and continue absorbing the blows that His body had taken. However, the shock of it all would be lessened because they had been forewarned. Jesus continued...

John 16:5-6

5 But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, Where are you going? 6 But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart.

In the midst of difficult news, it's hard not to focus on how it affects YOU, right? That's where the disciples' minds were. THEY were being left alone, so they thought. They had no concept of the terrible last mile of Jesus' journey back to the Father. Had they understood, they would've been concerned for Him. Had they but considered things from Jesus' position for a moment, that He was finally going back to be with His Father after being away from Him for 33 years, they would've REJOICED!

Peter had asked where Jesus was going back in chapter 13 and Thomas in chapter 14, but as they were overtaken by SORROW, the disciples had STOPPED ASKING where He was going. Had they only continued pursuing the question, the understanding of Christ's glorious destination would have been of great consolation, especially given the fact that, after their persecution, it would also be theirs. Nevertheless, their grief caused their focus to turn inward, causing them to not only be consumed by sorrow but also unable to see the very thing that would've joyfully brought them out of it. In the midst of suffering and trial, we mustn't allow ourselves to turn inward and fixate so much on our affliction that we would allow it to crowd joy out of the picture entirely. Matthew Henry said it so well...

"That which filled the disciples' hearts with sorrow, and hindered the operation of the cordials Christ administered, was too great an affection to this present life..."

Remember, they were looking forward to ruling with Jesus after He set up His earthly kingdom, but now all He promised them was suffering and persecution. Henry said...

"Nothing is a greater prejudice to our joy in God than the love of the world; and the sorrow of the world, the consequence of it."

Stop trying to find your joy in this world! It isn't here, and it never will be! Keep looking UP! Keep looking to Jesus and keep seeing the trials that He knew about and could've stopped but still allowed into our lives, not as curses, but as blessings meant to conform us further into His image.

This is a gut-wrenching scene, but a NECESSARY one. Jesus wouldn't be PHYSICALLY with the disciples as they went through the coming persecution, but they wouldn't be alone...

John 16:7

Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.

Jesus' departure was ADVANTAGEOUS to them. It meant SENDING THE HOLY SPIRIT. As Jesus talks about Him, He describes Him with a descriptive nickname: the Helper. The Greek term for Helper describes One ***"destined to take the place of Christ with the apostles (after his ascension to the Father), to lead them to a deeper knowledge of the gospel truth, and give them divine strength needed to enable them to undergo trials and persecutions on behalf of the divine kingdom."***

Jesus goes as far as saying that **"the Helper will not come to you...if I do not go away,"** and that's because His going away wasn't just speaking of His ascension back to the Father. It also included His death, burial, and resurrection that paid for their sins and made it so that the Spirit could be sent to indwell them! Without Jesus' going away, there would've been no gospel, no salvation, no eternal life, and no means by which we could've become the Temple of the Holy Spirit. Jesus WHOLE PURPOSE for COMING into this world was to LEAVE IN THIS WAY. They didn't see it yet, but the Spirit would give them understanding of it as well as the supernatural strength they needed to endure persecution. And how amazing it is to see that Peter, who fell away with the rest of the disciples initially when Jesus was arrested, fully grasped His meaning and purpose in warning them of the persecution to come. He continued warning believers, warning US of that persecution and its BLESSEDNESS, saying...

1 Peter 4:12-14

12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. 14 If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

"Don't be surprised at the fiery trials that come with bearing witness of Christ! REJOICE! You're blessed! God's Spirit is working in and through you AS PROMISED."

"I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away...that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you." Who looks forward to persecution? [Raise hand.] No one

does, but you know what? You're more ready for it than you were when you first arrived! Having foretold it, Jesus reaffirmed His deity and reassures our hearts that WE HAVE THE TRUTH. WE HAVE CHOSEN RIGHT! Even amidst the words of warning from Jesus there is HOPE and a call for us to COUNT THE COST of following Him. "Is He worthy of my suffering?" We know the answer is a RESOUNDING YES, but we each must answer for ourselves. IS HE WORTHY? I've asked that question all morning, and we thought we would end singing those words as we ponder them in light of the context of Jesus' warning. "Is He worthy of facing persecution over? IS HE WORTHY?"