

## Read - Pray

### Intro - Open to John 16:1-4

Open Doors USA is an organization which tracks and aids persecuted Christians across the world. They put out their “World Watch List” of the top 50 countries where it is most difficult to follow Jesus. This year, Afghanistan took the top spot due to the Taliban's takeover and the imminent and executed threat to Christians in that nation. Islamic Jihadists will kill Christians for Allah, their false God, and Atheists do the same.

Ironically, communist and Atheistic regimes perform their acts for gods of their own making. One example is the former #1 of the “World Watch List” for the past 20 years, North Korea. They are performing a religious cleansing for their deified dictator. To be caught following Jesus is to be imprisoned, tortured and killed. Out of an estimated 400,000 Christians in the country, there are 50 to 70 thousand in North Korean prisons and labor camps. Other Atheists and regimes might justify their killing for progress or ideological purity within their country or community. The idolatry of self within atheism does not have any limits to the atrocities it can commit.

In our text this morning, during their walk to the garden, Jesus has been telling his disciples what they must do in a hostile world without Him. A world of dictators and religious fanatics like our own day. Chapter 15 has been about our responsibility to act. To abide, to love, to testify. Chapter 16 will be about what Jesus has and will do. Applied and accomplished by his Holy Spirit. 15:26-27 is the preview of the Holy Spirit's coming that will be promised in our text next week. So, although the Holy Spirit is not mentioned in our 4 verses this morning, his work is implied. Keep that in mind.

Standing up to testify about Christ in a hostile world will bring consequences. Consequences Jesus will speak of now, in the hours before his arrest.

To sum up our text this morning: **Jesus has spoken and will help us persevere through his word and Holy Spirit.** Jesus' words to his disciples will keep us from Rejecting Christ, from Recanting Christ, and keep us Remembering Christ.

## One – Kept from Rejecting Christ

Read John 16:1

“These things”, is a phrase that will change meaning based upon the context in the next few verses. In verse 1, “these things” are the worldly hostilities we discussed last week. A hostility in the form of hatred for the twelve disciples and subsequent disciples they make. In this hatred, the pressure to reject Christ will be intense. This is why Jesus speaks. To keep them from stumbling, or to become disillusioned. To keep them from seeing the hostility of the world and say “I would never want that”. I would never follow his example, pick up his cross, it's too steep a price.

The cost is indeed so steep that the twelve will stumble at first. They will be caught off guard by the betrayal of Judas, Jesus' arrest and of course his public humiliating crucifixion. It will shatter and scatter them. So why would Jesus say this? Knowing as God that they would indeed stumble? Because believers in Christ need the Holy Spirit to not stumble into true unbelief. We need the work only the holy spirit can do, regeneration. To be regenerated is the Holy Spirit's work when a believer is born again. Remember this chapter is about what Jesus is and will do to keep them. Here to keep them from stumbling and rejecting Christ. Something changes in the disciples from those scattered during a threat to their life and being the bold preachers on the streets of Jerusalem in Acts. It is the empowering work of the Holy Spirit. He takes stumblers in their flesh to bold ones in the Spirit.

Through the work of Christ's words and the Holy Spirit in the disciples, they are regenerated to live holy and emboldened lives for Christ. When the apostles were brought before the Jewish authorities in Acts 5:40b-42 <sup>40</sup> *...and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then released them.* <sup>41</sup> *So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name.* <sup>42</sup> *And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.*

Friends, we need a regenerated heart with a biblical understanding of suffering because many of us just aren't being equipped for a world which will try to make us despair for the prize we have claimed. Jesus did not want the twelve, or us to see his suffering, to see the martyrs of the church and think “I am glad its them not me”. There are two errors here.

**First**, we can underestimate the prize, that Christ and his salvation could seem too small a treasure. We don't think it to be the treasure in a field or a pearl of great value in Jesus' parables of the immense worth of his kingdom. **Second**, we can miss the great joy that the apostles had, *"being worthy to suffer shame for His name"*. The person who is truly regenerated by the Holy Spirit will not reject Christ. They will see that suffering for Jesus' name is worth every drop of blood and tears.

We must reflect on Jesus' warning to not reject Christ and therefore fail to come to him, but we must also trust his words so we will not recant once we do believe and go back on our faith either.

## Two – Kept from Recanting Christ

Read John 16:2-3

Consider the certainty of John's words. John writes to Christians who have been enduring persecution. John 20:31 is his mission statement: *"these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name."* In other words, you can be certain that as Jesus lives, speaks, dies and rises again, it is eternal life on the line. So when you experience what Jesus warns, excommunication and the threat or actual death, you will not recant.

The main trouble John is writing about is things he has seen and experienced with his own eyes. It is the Jewish persecution in the 1<sup>st</sup> century that is mostly in view here. Most early converts to Christ were Jews just like the twelve apostles. So they would share the fate of accusations of heresy and therefore the punishment of excommunication. This isn't a small thing. This would mean banishment from their places of worship yes, but their families and jobs and whole community would be stripped along with it.

The story of the blind man from John 9 shows us this was already happening to Jesus' followers. He was expelled from the synagogue because of his defense of Jesus.

Most who would expel someone from their church and family, Religious and Atheistic alike, would do so in the name of their God. This is what Jesus speaks of next when *"an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think he is offering service to God."* A phrase from 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish documents says,

*"Whoever sheds the blood of the wicked [Christian] is equal to one who brings a sacrifice."* The service offered to God, is a religious serving of their god, just like an animal slaughtered in sacrifice.

The apostle Paul was a zealous persecutor of Christians. He recounts in his letters and Luke records in the book of Acts the zealous and devout worship Paul sought to bring to God in the slaughter of Christians. In the greatest reversal, Paul would go from the persecutor to joining the persecuted. From giving to receiving the lashes.

Next Jesus gives us further explanation for this persecution. In verse 3, we get another *"these things"* but now in reference to the persecution of excommunication and death from verse 2. Jesus explains here that Paul, and others like him, persecute Christians because they do not know the Father or himself. What an indictment. Especially for a Jew. They of course rejected Jesus, but Jesus shows as he has said before, since they have rejected him, they do not even know God the Father they claim to worship. This helps the disciples avoid the disillusionment when their Jewish brothers and sisters would harm them in the name of God. Zeal does not determine what is right, it is your authority. Is it the Father and Lord or not?

When the disciples hear what Jesus is saying, you can only imagine they are thinking "How will my faith survive this onslaught?" Remember, they are to receive the Holy Spirit who will keep them from stumbling over Christ. They will be regenerated to desire Christ despite the cost. Then, now knowing the high price, the Holy Spirit will seal and keep the apostles to persevere.

*"Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise,"*

Ephesians 1:13

Our faith in Christ is worked out by the Holy Spirit in our regeneration and our sealing. And Jesus is previewing this work. Jesus' words are a stark warning to keep his disciples from rejecting or recanting Christ but he doesn't just play defense. He will play offense too. He will keep us to Remember his words and his life.

## Three – Kept TO Remember Christ

Read John 16:4

Our third “**these things**” refers back again to Jesus’ teaching on the hatred from the world. A teaching that is meant to prepare them for his death. In hearing his warning, and now the Holy Spirit’s help in remembering it, they would endure.

Knowing persecution and suffering is coming, being warned, makes their suffering no longer just a regrettable result. Suffering is transformed into confirmation of their faith. Those who truly have faith in Christ will suffer. Paul, one who was the giver and receiver of Christian persecution, said this:

***12 Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.***

2 Timothy 3:12

All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus, one who is truly a Christian, WILL, not possibly, not probably, but WILL be persecuted. But let me clarify by saying what this doesn’t mean. This doesn’t mean that Christians will all experience the same persecution. Or that Christians should label everything they don’t like as persecution. Or that Christians should be sadists, who enjoy suffering, and seek out persecution. Every Christian is not called to North Sentinel Island, an island of cannibals, to go and certainly trade their life for the gospel. But every Christian should expect to, if they are truly sharing the offensive Gospel of Christ, they should expect to be persecuted.

At Midwestern, I took my New Testament classes from Dr. Alan Tomlinson. He began as a professor at Midwestern in 1995 and when I took his class in 2016, that’s twenty years of students. He told us when teaching through 2 Corinthians, chapters 4 and 6 speak of the certainty of persecution for specifically a Christian pastor. Dr. Tomlinson said that he had been warning students for decades that believers should expect and know persecution is coming because of these warnings from Jesus and Paul. He said his students in his early years would dismiss the warnings and not take it seriously. Now, students receive it with sober acceptance. I am sure the same is true for you. 20 years ago, persecution seemed far off and unimaginable. What about now? It seems that from our series on Biblical Sexual Morality, to Craig’s message last week, to the threats in China and Russia, to the governments around the world including ours that are seizing more and more power during this pandemic, wouldn’t that seem like we should prepare?

Jesus and Paul are not crazy people holding signs on the street corners saying, “The end is near”. They are giving us the words from the author of time, who knows the end from the beginning, and will bring this age to a close. For the disciples then and for the disciples now we see that Jesus was right about the depth of suffering we would have, so he must also be right about the heights of heaven and joy in Himself!

Lets receive this warning with the sober reflection it deserves. Let the Holy Spirit do it’s work in guiding you to truth and understanding the scriptures.

Jesus closes with what seems at first glance, a confusing statement. ***These things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you.***

Jesus is not saying that he had withheld the truth from them. He is not a social salesman hiding the all the negatives until it’s too late. You already signed up. Instead, he is saying that when he is here on earth, his presence with his disciples was like a magnet for worldly and demonic opposition. No opposition was directly attracted to the disciples while Christ was here on the earth, but now he has returned to heaven. Where does his spirit now dwell on earth? In his followers. In these disciples. In us.

Your new life is a magnet for trial and trouble. You cannot turn it off, so brace yourself and trust that Jesus’ words and the Holy Spirit’s work in you will keep you from rejecting, keep you from recanting and WILL keep you constantly remembering Christ. **Jesus has spoken and will help us persevere through his word and Holy Spirit.**

## Conclusion

No one likes to be the bearer of bad news. Some religions and worldviews seek specially to give you no bad news. Indeed, why would you follow a God who allows bad news? Because his greater concern is our holiness. The gospel message is that because of our sin, we are lost and without hope. Utterly unholy. Christ rescues us by his death in our place. He warns the disciples of what is to come so they will not break, although they bend. That they will be the foundation for his church, tested and tried in the fires of persecution.

We know what church history says of their generation. They are the apostles. The givers of the scriptures. The martyrs and church fathers. What will church history say of our generation? What will your family say of you? When you faced the trials of your life, did you break?

We need to prepare our faith for intellectual and emotional challenges. Expect it. Your faith will be challenged by arguments against God's existence or the Bible's authority. Emotionally you can be challenged when your mom or child dies. It will be hard on your faith. I am seeing it right now in my friends. So, heed Christ's words here for your own sake before you too are tested. High schoolers, you need to know objections to the faith before you encounter them as young adults. Childlike faith is a deep trust. A tested faith, is childlike faith hardened by endurance in the power of the Holy Spirit.

I encourage you to prepare in two ways:

**First**, read or study apologetics. It's a fancy word which means defend the faith. If you are a new Christian, recruit the help of a mature Christian to get started. Even learn the arguments against Christianity so you can see the wealth of study through the generations that have answered these objections with real good answers. Develop a tested faith. A faith that deepens when it is challenged.

**Second**, like Christ calls specifically in this text we need to remember the words of Christ. We need to memorize scripture. There may come a day when your prison cell will not come with a Bible like it does today. We need to memorize scripture because there may come a day, like it does in other countries, when the Bible is outlawed.

This is not alarmist. I want you to hear Jesus' warning as it would apply to us today that we must be ready. We must be kept by his power. The power of his words and his Holy Spirit. We must know the worst can come so we will not reject or recant but we will remember his words and persevere.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German pastor during Hitler's rise to power and reign in Nazi Germany. In 1937 before the outbreak of war, before the testing of German pastors and Christians had come to its fullness, he said "Suffering...is the badge of true discipleship. The disciple is not above his Master...Luther (the great reformer) reckoned suffering among the marks of the true church... Discipleship means allegiance to the suffering Christ, and it is therefore not at all surprising that Christians should be called upon to suffer." **Christian, you will suffer.** But listen to Jesus' words. You can and will endure through the power of the Holy Spirit regenerating you, sealing you and equipping you with the true words of Jesus. What can we not endure when Christ dwells in us? What will the Holy Spirit not provide that we need?