

## John on Jesus - Persecution

**June 30, 2013**

Welcome to Faith Church. If you are new, my name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. Today is a great day in the history of what God is doing through Faith Church. We heard from a former pastor and how God is using him to plant a new church in Florida. We installed Pastor Jordan on staff as the campus pastor for our new Spencer location opening later this year. This is one of the first steps in Faith Church becoming a church that meets in more than one location to reach beyond our city and into our region with the Gospel.

In the United States, between 3,500-4,000 churches close each year.<sup>1</sup> Today is a good day in the life of Faith Church as we get a chance to see how God is using us to offset that number. If you are here to join us for the barbecue ribs and chicken and join us in our celebration of Pastor Jordan's arrival, it is great to have you.

As a church, we are studying through the Gospel of John. Take out your Bibles and find John 15. If you are using a pew Bible, that is found on page 902. I won't talk long. I know you are looking forward to the celebration lunch, just as I am. The truth is, a meal from God's kitchen will do us more good than any meal from the church kitchen. Let's jump in.

In John 15, Jesus was only hours away from his crucifixion. Judas had already left to betray Jesus. Jesus was taking his final moments with his disciples. He was speaking from his heart because he loved them and was

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://catalystconference.com/read/us-churches-no-longer-in-decline/>

preparing them to continue the mission reconciling the world to God through his life after he was gone. The apostle John, who was one of the 12 apostles, gave us a window into what Jesus said in those final minutes because he was there. John told Jesus words to us because they are lessons we need to know if we are going to continue the mission of telling the world about God's love for us to send his son to die for us even though we deserve eternal punishment.

In the weeks leading up to this morning, in our studies of John 14 and 15, we learned that, while Jesus would be gone, he would not leave his apostles, or us, alone. After he conquered the grave, Jesus ascended back to his heavenly father, and the Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit to be with us and in us. Before the Holy Spirit, Christ was physically in front of them. After Christ's death, and the sending of the Holy Spirit, it was like Christ dwelled among them and in them. Part of the Holy Spirit's job is to bring to mind the things of Christ and to help us apply them to our lives. When we ask God to forgive us our sins and trust in Jesus to save us, the Holy Spirit comes into our lives and that is part of what he does. He is like Jesus in our hearts.

Last week, we learned that while the Holy Spirit is in us, we need to learn to live in dependence upon him. That means we are to talk to God in prayer all the time about little things and big things. We are to read God's Word, and as we do, the Holy Spirit will guide our lives. When we live in dependence upon Christ, Jesus says we will bear fruit. That means we will be doing things that make an eternal difference.

As we get to John 15:17, Jesus said that if you stick to this plan of leaning on the Holy Spirit and bearing fruit, it will be great. You will be a people that are known by their love for one another. The Holy Spirit will transform the church into a great place because the people of the church will love one another and bear fruit like Jesus. Things sound great --- people loving each other, people living in dependence upon God. What an amazing future. Then we get to verse 18, where we pick up today, and things take quite a turn.

### **Expect to be hated and suffer.**

“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. 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.” John 15:18–21 (ESV)

“Guess what. When you love people, serve people and live in dependence upon the Holy Spirit, people aren’t going to like you. In fact, they will start to hate you, just like they hated me. They will hate you for living in dependence upon me,” Jesus said. “I just want you to be prepared for this. You need to understand following me is not all sugar and peaches. People will just hate you for it.” The obvious question is, “Why?” Jesus began to explain.

“I chose you out of the world.” By the way, Jesus told them that ultimately they didn’t choose to follow him but he chose them and took them out of the world, just like he chose us. He softened our hearts and drew us to himself. Jesus said, “I chose you out of this world.”

Let me pause and explain the term world. It is a little bit of a funky term. When I grew up, the church was always preaching against worldliness. The picture you had was everything outside of the church was worldly and evil. Watching a movie was worldly. Having a VCR or BETA was worldly. Maybe you could have a CB radio but cell phones were too far. People also led you to believe that everything inside the church was good and godly. Then I got into ministry and I discovered the church has lots of messed up people. Cell phones are great, and there are lots of things outside the church that are good and not necessarily evil, like “Duck Dynasty.” So this idea of the church being all good and everything else all bad just doesn’t work. What was Jesus talking about when he said “the world”?

When Jesus talked about worldliness, he was talking about the way the world lives and acts in opposition to God. Jesus said that apart from God choosing us, reaching into our lives and drawing us to repentance and trust in Jesus, the heart of everyone in this world is in rebellion against God and God’s presence. When we live depending upon the Holy Spirit so we are like Christ, we start to smell like Jesus and a world that is against God doesn’t like that.

In 1 John, John said it this way:

**We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. 1 John 5:19 (ESV)**

The false picture we have in our minds is that we are following God and living in dependence upon Christ through the Holy Spirit and everyone else that isn’t a Satanist is in neutral territory. That is unbiblical. Everyone is against us

because their hearts are opposed to God and they ultimately have Satan as their leader. Because of that, they will be opposed to you.

Just as the world rejected Christ and crucified him, expect the world will reject and persecute me. Don't take it personally. Expect it.

### **Expect to be persecuted without reason.**

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 15:22–25 (ESV)

Sometimes, when we suffer, we deserve it. Sometimes we are mean and grumpy and just plain rude and people treat us harshly. Everybody say it with me, "Sometimes I deserve to suffer." That happens.

Jesus told us that we should expect to suffer without reason. Think of Christ's life. What did he do that drew the anger of the religious leaders that led to his crucifixion? He healed people. He helped people. He fed a starving crowd of 5,000 that came out to hear him teach in the wilderness. What did Jesus do that he deserved to have Judas play part in his murder?

If he did anything that could possibly get people all fired up against him it was times he told the truth, like when he turned the tables on the religious leaders who brought the woman caught in adultery and pointed out the reason they caught her in the act of adultery was because they were Peeping Toms. The truth hurts. Even then, Jesus forgave her and said he didn't condemn her. In reality, he was getting ready to die on the cross to pay for her sin.

Jesus told us we should expect to be hated and persecuted without reason, especially when we are living in dependence upon the Holy Spirit, doing good and loving people like Jesus. The reason people will hate us for no reason at all is because everyone, apart from Christ, is in rebellion against God and trying to push God out of their lives.

I think we need to expect this as we move out into our community and love people, like with our playground build on Monday and Tuesday of this week. This year as we try to give backpacks of food to kids who are hungry on the weekend and tell them we love them because God loves them through Jesus, expect to be hated without reason. You say, “Why would people hate us because of this?” That is the point. The world is opposed to Jesus; they crucified him. With Jesus living in us through the Holy Spirit, expect the world to be opposed to us, without reason.

At its core, the only people out there are those in rebellion against God and those who know God through Jesus. There is no middle ground. Those aren't my words, I'm just putting my finger in the Bible, which seems like a pretty good place to keep it.

### **When talking about Jesus, we don't work alone.**

“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 (ESV)

One of the worst things is going through tough times alone. There is great news. Jesus encourages the disciples, and us, by telling them they would not be alone. When people were making their lives tough for no reason at all, they

wouldn't be telling others about Jesus alone. The Holy Spirit WAS working in people's hearts as they told others about Jesus.

I know this was incredibly encouraging for the apostles. As they told others about how much God loves them through Jesus and they suffered for it for no apparent reason at all, it wouldn't just be their words. In those times, the Holy Spirit was working in people's hearts to draw others to eternal life.

This reminds me of Acts 16 where Paul and Silas were put in prison for telling people about Jesus. They were praying and singing hymns to God during the night the Philippian jailer was no doubt listening to their attempt at worship music. God rocked the place with an earthquake and opened the doors. When the Phillipian jailer saw what happened, the Holy Spirit was working in his heart at the same time Paul was attempting a little praise and worship music. It is like WWF tag team wrestling with the Holy Spirit and our words working on people, but the Holy Spirit never tags out.

This is something we need to take away. When we tell our friends about Jesus and how much Jesus loved to die for us, expect our friends to reject us and think we are weird. In school, expect to get picked last for kickball. Especially when we do things to love on them. Don't be discouraged. We are not alone. The Holy Spirit is running tag team with us, and he jumps in the mix and wrestles with people's hearts as God uses our words to wrestle with people's minds.

**It is not if persecution will come, it is only a matter of when.**

**"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. 'I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you.'" John 16:1–4 (ESV)

Jesus said, "I am telling you this to warn you. You need to expect to be persecuted. The more you live in dependence upon me and the more fruit you bear and the more eternal good you do, expect to suffer because of it." The world is not neutral. It is under the control of the devil. The heart of every man and woman apart from Christ is in deep seated rebellion against God. In fact, the time will even come that people will think killing you is an act of worship to God. That is how twisted the world is. Be prepared!

### **Were the apostles, and others, persecuted like Jesus said?**

Now I typically spend more time in the text, but I thought it would be appropriate to extend beyond John 15 and answer two questions. First, "What happened to the apostles?" Were they persecuted for Christ? Was the Holy Spirit really in there with them helping them witness? We will come back and get the next logical question in a moment.

What I am about to tell you is not from the Bible. It comes from historical documents that are accepted as reliable, but this doesn't give them the authority of the Bible.

History tells us James, the author of the book in the Bible that bears his name, at the age of 94, had his head clubbed in simply because he loved Jesus and loved people. Matthew was murdered with a long-handled ax simply because he talked about Jesus. Maybe you have seen one in medieval



literature. We are talking a huge blade, a six-foot long handle and a sword on the end. He was hacked into pieces. Mark was torn to pieces by an angry mob, for no crime at all. Luke was hung. A popular way many of the apostles were killed was crucifixion. It seems people figured that if you wanted to love people like Christ, you needed to die like Christ. Peter had an interesting crucifixion under the Roman emperor Nero. Peter didn't feel he was worthy to be crucified like Christ so he requested to be crucified upside down. Paul was beheaded. The apostle John was the only apostle who did not die for his faith. It wasn't for a lack of trying. They boiled him in oil like a French fry but he lived through it.

I think my favorite is Andrew. This is a little known story about Andrew. Usually, before a crucifixion, you were beaten with a cat o' nine tails, like Jesus. The goal was to so totally destroy you that you died quickly on the cross and got things over with so everybody could go home in time for dinner. Apparently, for Andrew, that didn't happen, so he hung on the cross dangling between life and death for two days. In addition, they didn't crucify him on a "T" shaped crucifix, they used an "X" shaped one, which would make his death an even lengthier process.

While hanging on the cross, mobs of people came around to see him die. Andrew figured he had gathered a crowd and he was in a great speaking position so he conducted church. For two solid days he told people about their sins and the love God for them through Jesus. He quoted Scripture and fulfilled prophecy. If he had an altar call, it would be interesting to watch in action. As he hung on the cross, he was leading people to Christ while dying for Christ.

In Acts 12, it tells how James, the older brother of the apostle John, was killed by Herod. Church tradition tells us that James was brought before a Roman official who gave him his death sentence, telling him he would get beheaded. The official asked him if he had any final words, to which James said, "Yes, I do." He looked the guy in the eyes and just laid it all out. "You are a sinful man. I will die today forgiven by Jesus and go home to be with God all because of what Jesus did when he died for my sin. You will die soon and God's wrath for your sin will be against you for all of eternity. You will suffer eternally in hell. Today is the day; now is the time; before my head is cut off, will you repent of your sin, trust in Jesus and become a Christian?" The guy said, "Yes." I love this. Talk about making good use of your time. As a result, this Roman official's boss was so angry that he became a Christian, his boss decided to take off the Roman official's head along with James on the same day.

The story continues. There is so much I could say but won't so I put numerous books and websites in your handout to look at this week.<sup>2</sup> In the early church, while Christianity grew like wild fire, there were also incredible periods of persecution. For example, the Roman emperor Nero tried to burn down Rome. When the people stormed his palace demanding an explanation for why he didn't call out the fire department but let Rome, people's houses and businesses burn down and thousands of people die, he blamed the Christians. Even though the Christians were doing immense good, they were persecuted without reason, just like Jesus said.

---

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.persecutionblog.com>; <http://www.prisoneralert.com>; <http://www.vombooks.com> Books - Jesus Freaks by DC Talk and Voice of the Martyrs

There are thousands of stories of Christians persecuted throughout history. I briefly want to share some that caught my eye.

One is of the story of the young Christian woman named Agatha from the year 251 A.D. There are a few women in each generation that are born with such stunning natural beauty that they don't wear makeup. Agatha was one of those women, just drop dead gorgeous. She loved Jesus. Her beauty caught the eye of the governor of Sicily who wanted her to sleep with him. He made numerous passes but she held him off. She said that as a Christian, she was saving herself for marriage and wouldn't sleep with him. After a while, his spurned lust turned into anger. He forced her to be under the care of an extremely perverted woman named Aphrodica, who ran a brothel, in hopes of luring her into a looser lifestyle.

After some time, Aphrodica reported to the governor that in spite of her best efforts to seduce her, Agatha honored Christ and kept her purity. The governor gave her one last chance to sleep with him or face his wrath. You can guess how this unfolds. Because she chose to save herself for marriage, in his rage, the Sicilian governor decided to transform her from a ravishing beauty to a hideous beast. She was whipped, her flesh was burned with hot irons and then torn open with sharp hooks. To make her more hideous and disfigure her beyond recognition, they laid her on a bed of glowing coals mixed with broken glass. She was then sent back to prison where she lived as a hideous beast for a period of time before she died. Teenagers, I know it is hard to be faithful to Christ and keep your purity in our sexually-charged culture, but what we face is nothing

compared to this. I pray Agatha's story is an encouragement to you. While she became hideous to the eyes of men, she became even more beautiful in the eyes of God, the one set of eyes looking at her that really mattered. She was hated, without cause, just like Jesus said his followers would be.

The same things continue today. Estimates are that in 1998 alone, 164,000 Christians died for their faith.<sup>3</sup> If you go to the Voice of the Martyrs website you can get updates on what is happening in Sudan where Christian families are destroyed and limbs taken off with machetes, all because they love and care for others in Jesus' name. Christians are hated without cause in Pakistan, in India, in China and around the world. One link I put in your bulletin is a link to a Youtube video interview of a Chinese man who was stripped naked in the winter, stuck outside and hosed down with water repeatedly in the frigid cold, all because he gave away free material about Christ.<sup>4</sup> It is touching to hear his story about how Jesus carried him through that persecution, and he was not alone.

That link was shared with me by Pat Kelly. Pat is part of the Faith Church family. He is a neighbor and friend. God laid it upon his heart to write letters to imprisoned Christians who are suffering around the world for no other reason than loving Jesus.

John is clear, persecution will happen to us, for no other reason than loving Jesus and bearing fruit. Expect it.

The second question I had is, "Why haven't we experienced it?"

---

<sup>3</sup> [Jesus Freaks](#), by DC Talk and Voice of the Martyrs, cover page.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.persecutionblog.com/2013/01/criminal-or-hero.html>

## Why haven't we experienced more persecution?

For the most part, we haven't had to suffer. I think there are two reasons suffering is escaped.

### **1. The more we identify with Christ, the more we will suffer like Christ.**

Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, 2 Timothy 3:12 (ESV)

The more we become like Christ, the more we will be persecuted like Christ. Sometimes we don't suffer because we are just like the world. We have the same values as the world around us. There is nothing distinctive about us so we don't make waves. We don't give away our cash or our time to those in need. Our sexual ethics are no different. The movies we watch are no different. When we sin, we don't repent and say we are sorry. Sometimes the world does not persecute us because we are no different. We are not abiding in Christ.

As a church, God is incredibly good to us. We are reaching people through the Internet and in our community. We are opening another campus and we are innovating to reach people. With all of the things we celebrate today, I wouldn't be surprised if we draw some persecution from the world around us. I expect that, without reason, people will be saying things about us that aren't true. The Bible promises us that if we live a godly life in Christ, we will be persecuted.

### **2. Persecution comes in seasons.**

This week, as I studied the persecutions in the church, what struck me was how seasonal it was and how difficult it was to forecast. The church would grow unhindered for 40-100 years. It was doing immense good as Christians adopted unwanted children, took care of the poor and prayed for their

government officials, then a new ruler would come to power and look for a scapegoat. The church would go in his crosshairs. Christians found themselves suffering and dying. If we take a panoramic view of history, we find that America, in our moment of history, is one of those brief blips where there is minimal suffering for being for Christ. History tells us that the tables will turn and we will find ourselves suffering for Christ. It will happen. Check out the Voice of the Martyrs website and you will get an idea of what our brothers and sisters around the world are going through.

## Conclusion

So as we close and prepare to enjoy a wonderful feast celebrating the arrival of Pastor Jordan and thanking God for his kindness toward us in this season as we open another campus, we do that against the backdrop of what many of our brothers and sisters are facing around the world. While we may be able to glorify you by celebrating your goodness with a meal, for so many, you have chosen to allow them to honor you through suffering.

Prayer - Heavenly Father, we pray that you would give our suffering brothers and sisters strength to stay faithful. We pray that they would see great fruit as the Holy Spirit promises to work in the hearts of others as they are suffering. We pray for many situations just like the apostles James and Andrew, that even as they are suffering and dying, people would come to Christ because of it.

Thank you for this straight talk from your Word to prepare your apostles, and us, for the tough season. A season of suffering will, most likely, come for all of us. As the Bible tells us, everyone who desires to live a godly life for Christ will be persecuted. We are especially thankful to you for Pastor Jordan and for you bringing him to our staff. We thank you for all the progress made toward opening day of the Spencer campus. We thank you for the food. As we eat together, we give all thanks, honor and praise to you, the provider of every good and perfect gift. Amen.



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the EFCA. He enjoys reading, writing, time with his family and wrestling with his sons. His favorite topics of study are ancient rhetoric and preaching. Feel free to contact him at [ktruck@gmail.com](mailto:ktruck@gmail.com) or visit his web at [www.christ2Rculture.com](http://www.christ2Rculture.com)

© Dr. Kurt Trucksess. You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that: (1) you credit the author, (2) any modifications are clearly marked, (3) you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, (4) you include the web site address (<http://www.christ2Rculture.com>) on the copied resource.

