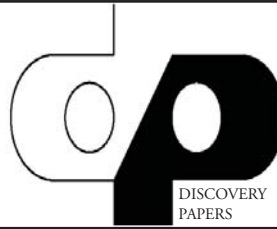




PREPARE FOR SUFFERING



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John 15:18-16:15
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I grew up with an older brother and an older sister. I remember going through a stage as a kid where I would yell good night to my whole family after being put to bed. I would yell, “I love you, Mom,” “I love you, Dad,” “I love you Jeff,” and then “I like you, Kim.”

I thought it sounded weird to tell my sister that I loved her. I eventually got over it. So then I would yell, “I love you, Mom,” “I love you, Dad,” “I love you, Kim,” and then “I like you, Jeff.” I had decided that it was OK to tell your sister that you loved her, but not your brother.

It’s surprising to go from hearing about loving people to hearing about liking people. What we’re looking at this morning is even more surprising. Our passage last week ended with Jesus talking about love. This week, he starts out talking about hatred.

Hatred is an ugly thing. Nothing comes close to it. There is a chilling story of hatred recorded in the book of Acts. It has to do with a group of powerful religious people who got angry at a young Christian named Stephen. We will read just part of the story.

“Now when [the council] heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at [Stephen].” (Acts 7:54)

“They cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul.” (Acts 7:57–58)

Can you imagine hating someone enough to pick up stones to throw at that person until they were killed? Can you imagine watching someone die like that? Can you imagine a community—people that know each other—rising against one of their own like that? Can you imagine throwing a stone at someone and killing them? Hatred is an ugly thing.

Far, far away it’s a beautiful Sunday morning in Palo Alto. We are all gathered in a relatively safe building. Some of us are stressed because we didn’t have time for our coffee this morning. Very few of us are worried about being hated.

Yet we are gathered here to worship a man who was hated. He was hated with a bitterness that ran so deep that priests were willing to lie to see him destroyed. He was hated by kings. He was hated by the crowd. He was hated and he was murdered. What do we do with that?

Today we are continuing in our series looking at the Upper Room discourse from the Gospel of John. We have been looking at this section all throughout the season of Lent as we look toward the mourning of Good Friday and the joy of Easter morning. This section of the gospel records the words and actions of Jesus just before he is arrested by those who hate him. Just before he stands before a rigged trial and faces execution.

This morning we are looking at John 15:18–16:15. Jesus has washed the disciples’ feet. He has asked his disciples to follow his example to love one another and predicted his own betrayal. He has comforted them about not being alone when he is gone. He has invited them into friendship with him, using the imagery of the vine as a metaphor.

Now he turns to prepare them for the kind of thing that happened to Stephen in the seventh chapter of Acts. In this passage, Jesus is preparing his disciples for one thing: they will suffer as his followers. Following Jesus means people will hate you. This morning we will see Jesus asking us to prepare for suffering. *Prepare for Suffering.*

Very few of us will experience the kind of hatred that Stephen experienced. Very few of us will experience anything that comes close. So what is this passage going to mean to us? If we aren’t likely to face the kind of hatred and suffering that Stephen faced, how do we understand Jesus’ words of warning? What does it mean for us to be prepared to suffer if our suffering won’t come close to the suffering of others?

Those are the questions that we’ll be addressing this morning. In our passage this morning, Jesus tells his disciples that they have to expect a certain kind of hatred from the world. He tells them how to be prepared for it. And he tells them how the Spirit that he is sending will help them in the midst of it.

As we read these words, we will discover that they do

apply to us. We may not face the kind of hatred that Stephen faced, but the underlying issues are just as real in our culture as in first century Jerusalem. We need to be prepared to face the reality of believing in Christ in our particular culture. And we need to be aware of how the Spirit is at work in the background.

So let's see what Jesus has to say to his disciples about the suffering they will face and what we can learn about the suffering that we might face.

Recognize the Deeper Issues

We will start by reading the first part of this passage.

John 15:18–27—

“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. ¹⁹If 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. ²⁰Remember 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. ²¹But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. ²²If 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. ²³Whoever hates me hates my Father also. ²⁴If 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. ²⁵But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: ‘They hated me without a cause.’

²⁶“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. ²⁷And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.

In the previous section, Jesus was preparing his disciples to grow in their love for each other. Now he is preparing them to be hated by the world. So he starts out by helping them understand the source of the hatred that they will face. He wants them to know where it comes from, what causes it, how it was already predicted, and who is involved in it. All of this information comes down to one main

point.

You will be hated, but their hatred isn't about you.

The other day I was driving on the highway. I was merging from Highway 85 onto Highway 101 headed northbound. It was a left merge and it's always a bit tricky because you're trying to sync up with traffic coming from your right. I'm not sure exactly what happened. I didn't think that I did anything wrong. But apparently I upset someone as I was trying to merge. So I was greeted with a honk and a not-so-friendly gesture out the window.

For a split second, I made eye-contact with the man that was angry with me. I'm sure I didn't see the kind of hatred in his eyes that Stephen saw, but it felt like it was close: pure anger.

To be honest, it shook me up the rest of the day. I kept wondering why that person was so upset at me. Had I really done something so wrong? It wasn't even the situation that happened that kept coming back to me. It was how angry that person was. I kept seeing his eyes.

Jesus says that people are going to hate his followers with a hatred way more intense than that. But he takes the time to describe in detail the source of that hatred. Most counselors will point out that emotions like anger and hatred are a second level emotion. They start with something else. Hurt or injustice or some kind of pain. This is what Jesus is telling his disciples. Their hatred starts with other emotions.

Jesus says, “*[The world] has hated me before it hated you.*” There are people in this world that are antagonistic toward Jesus. These are the ones that put him to death. They are the ones that write angry books about atheism in our world.

Jesus says, “*I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.*” Jesus is describing a kind of jealousy that stems from dissatisfaction. The feeling that your life isn't good enough: others have it better. The sense of being a victim and watching everyone else enjoy success. I've had people tell me they are envious of my faith, even though they knew they could believe if they wanted to.

Jesus says, “*They do not know him who sent me.*” People in our world are disconnected from God. They have a vague sense that someone is there, but they are estranged. They feel the emptiness of being alone.

Finally, Jesus says, “*If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin.*”

Guilt and shame and feelings of inadequacy are all over the place. Most people feel like they don't measure up to something. And most people run away from those feelings. They don't know or don't want to know that forgiveness is available.

Whatever hatred the disciples will face from the world, it is not because of who they are. It is because of all the other stuff going on in the lives of the people around them. Dissatisfaction, jealousy, emptiness, guilt, loneliness, frustration, purposelessness, oppression, abuse. That is what makes them respond to Jesus with hatred. That is what makes them respond to his disciples in the same way.

Think about our culture: 21st century Silicon Valley. Let's assume that we aren't going to face the kind of hatred that Jesus or Stephen faced. But Jesus said that we can't expect to be treated any better than he was. So if we aren't going to face the same hatred, is it true that we will face the same underlying issues? Are people in our culture dissatisfied, jealous, empty, guilty, lonely, and frustrated?

Absolutely. So just as Jesus was encouraging his disciples to recognize the deeper issues behind hatred, we can recognize the deeper issues behind the variety of ways that people in our culture respond to us. Recognize the deeper issues.

Think again about the driver who got so mad at me on Highway 101. Nothing that I could have done merging onto a highway could have warranted that kind of a reaction. I don't know what was going on in his life, but it had to be something else. Maybe even a long history of something else.

And I'm familiar with that. I've had bad days. There are times where I'll come home in a bad mood or tired and one of my kids will do something annoying and I'll completely overact with frustration or anger. Deeper issues drive a lot of our behavior.

So, however people might respond to us, we can recognize that deeper issues drive a lot of it. People are alone. People feel guilty and unworthy. They lack purpose. They are dissatisfied with their lives but don't know how to change anything. In Jesus' day, these root issues came out as hatred and opposition. In our day, they are glossed over by the soothing power of entertainment and money and rich food and the lure of success.

In some ways, our culture is more dangerous. The issues are buried deeper. There are more opportunities to numb ourselves and hide our hearts. But make no mistake: people all around us are dying. They are dying from all the things

Jesus points out here.

Jesus was warning his disciples about hatred so that they could identify the deeper issues and have compassion on them. When I realize that this driver on 101 has something else going on besides being cut off by me, it means I can see him as a person. I can empathize with him. I can feel compassion. And if it were more than a passing interaction, I could reach out. That's ultimately what Jesus is getting at.

When we realize that people around us are hurting, we can have compassion. Even when we are hated, we can be compassionate.

Plan for Opposition

Jesus starts off by helping his disciples to understand the nature of the hatred that they are going to experience. He wants them to realize that it comes from other places. Then he explains to them why he's telling them all this.

John 16:1–6—

“I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. ²They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. ³And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. ⁴But 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. ⁵But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ ⁶But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart

Jesus is clear. He is warning his disciples because he wants them to be prepared. He wants them to know what to expect so that when it happens they aren't surprised. Because when you are surprised by the things you face in life, they are much worse than they could be. There is something about the element of not knowing where something is coming from or not realizing that it is going to be difficult that seems to double the intensity of a difficult situation.

I sometimes like to play rough with my sons. Sometimes I'll tell them to punch me in the stomach as hard as they can. I'll flex my stomach muscles—what little I have—

they'll swing as hard as they can and it's pretty difficult for them to hurt me. If I know it's coming, I'm fine. But sometimes they will catch me off guard and punch me in the stomach. And then it hurts. If I don't know it's coming, it hurts a lot more. Man, does it hurt.

Jesus is telling his disciples here that following him is going to hurt. He wants them to know that he is asking them to live among people that will reject them and their ideas. They aren't just supposed to live in that world; they are supposed to engage with those people. They are supposed to love them and invite them into relationship with God. He doesn't want them to be surprised by the response they will face.

Jesus faced some difficult things in his life: misunderstanding, people not believing who he said he was, being betrayed by those who are closest to him, poverty, separation from family, loneliness—that sense of being surrounded by people and wanting them to understand you, but knowing they don't.

Now Jesus tells those who would follow him that we can't expect to be treated any better. He tells us in advance so we aren't surprised by it and give up the whole thing. It will still hurt, but we don't have to be surprised. We can plan to be misunderstood and lonely and rejected. We can expect to be excluded. Jesus wants his disciples to plan ahead. *Plan for Opposition.*

We've already said that we probably won't experience the kind of opposition that Stephen faced. We probably won't be stoned for believing in Jesus. So what kind of opposition might we face? What kind of opposition should we plan for?

There are some people in our world that believe that religion is the problem, particularly religions that make any type of claim to universal truth. They think that it is these types of religions that cause wars and oppression and hatred. They think that without religions that claim to reveal truth, most of the conflict in our world would be done away with.

This is what Jesus means when he says, "*whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God.*" In his day that meant that the priests who oversaw the execution of Stephen thought they were pleasing God. In our day it means that those who would rid the world of universal truth claims think they are pleasing the god of peaceful coexistence.

They might not say it to our face, but I suspect that a surprising number of our neighbors and friends think the kind of faith we hold to is dangerous to the world, that

things would be better without it.

But there is another form of opposition that I think is even more dangerous. Some people think religion is dangerous, but others don't give religion much thought at all. It's not the problem, but it certainly isn't the solution. For a lot of people, religion is irrelevant. They are completely indifferent to God.

Elie Wiesel (pronounced Ellie Veezel), who survived the hatred of a Jewish concentration camp said this, "The opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference. The opposite of art is not ugliness, it's indifference. The opposite of faith is not heresy, it's indifference. And the opposite of life is not death, it's indifference."

Helen Keller observed something similar: "Science may have found a cure for most evils; but it has found no remedy for the worst of them all—the apathy of human beings."

If there's one overriding attitude toward Jesus in our culture, it is not hatred. It is indifference. It is apathy.

We aren't likely to be stoned by people who are indifferent. So in that sense, it's much easier to live in a culture of indifference. But in another sense, it is far more dangerous. If someone is willing to kill me for what I believe and if some of my brothers and sisters are willing to die for their faith, one thing is abundantly clear: what I believe matters.

But around here, no one cares what I believe. If I tell them I believe Jesus is God incarnate and died for their sins so that they can be reconciled to the creator of the universe and enjoy paradise for eternity, and they yawn and walk away, what do I do with that? They have told me that what I believe doesn't matter. It is inconsequential. "Go ahead with your silly religion. It doesn't affect me."

When we travel to India, our brothers and sisters there often tell us that they are praying for our faith. They say that they know how difficult it must be to stay faithful in our culture. This from people who are regularly in danger of physical abuse for their faith. They say this because they understand the danger of indifference.

Opposition to a belief system tends to actually strengthen those who believe it. Indifference is what destroys it. Opposition strengthens faith. Indifference destroys it.

These are the realities that we face: people who think religion is the problem and people who think religion doesn't matter. Just like Jesus' disciples needed to plan for hatred, we need to prepare for this kind of opposition.

Plan for condescension. Plan for indifference. Plan for patronizing. Don't be surprised by it. And don't fall away because of it.

Embrace Truth

Jesus has been helping his disciples to understand the persecution they will face because of him. He started by helping them to understand the source of the opposition. Then he explained that he was letting them know in advance so that they could be prepared. Finally, he tells them that behind the scenes, God will still be at work.

John 16:7–15—

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. ⁸And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; ¹⁰concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; ¹¹concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

¹²“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Earlier in the Upper Room Discourse, we saw Jesus start to refer to the Holy Spirit as the helper whom God will send. In that discussion, the focus was on the Spirit's presence in the life of the believers. Now Jesus expands a bit on the role of the Spirit. First, he describes how the Spirit will interact with the world that is persecuting followers of Jesus. Then he describes how the Spirit will interact with the disciples themselves as they face suffering.

Jesus says that the Spirit is at work in the world. He uses an interesting word to describe what the Spirit does. It's the Greek word "*elegzei*." It's translated as "convict" in the ESV. The NIV has "prove the world wrong." The basic definition of the word is to expose something or to bring something to light. The implication is that exposing what

is true will lead to conviction.

This is the one of the roles that the Spirit performs in the world. The Spirit helps people to realize what is really true in their hearts. For those who are persecuting Jesus, the Spirit exposes the truth.

For believers, Jesus says that the Spirit will "*guide you into all truth*." He will speak the things of God. He will speak of things to come. We saw last week that he will remind us of what Jesus said. The Spirit will help us to know the truth.

In both cases, the Spirit is concerned with truth. For those who don't know God, the Spirit reveals truth in an effort to bring them to repentance and dependence on God. For those who follow Jesus, the Spirit guides them into truth. The Spirit is always interested in truth.

I think Jesus points out the role of the Spirit as an encouragement. When his disciples are facing opposition, he wants them to know that God's work is not done. It isn't all up to them. It isn't all up to us. God is always at work.

But he also wants them to know about the central importance of the truth. Because whenever you are being persecuted, your initial instinct is to abandon the truth. When you're caught doing something you shouldn't, it's tempting to lie in order to avoid trouble. When someone is mad at you, you'll often say anything to calm them down, even if it isn't true.

In the face of opposition, truth is often the first thing to go. But Jesus wants his disciples to know for certain that truth is ultimately what will protect them. Earlier in this gospel, in John 8:32, he said, "*You will know the truth and the truth will set you free*." No matter the circumstances, freedom is always found through truth. Jesus wants his disciples to embrace truth no matter what. He wants the same for us. *Embrace truth*.

Jesus is saying that as we interact with people in our culture, whether it's our children or our parents or our spouses or our coworkers, the Spirit is always at work behind the scenes, advocating for truth. The Spirit is always about truth. If we want to join him in that work, we can embrace truth.

When Christians talk about valuing truth, they often focus on the truth of what they believe. We are reminded that we need to stand firm for what we believe. And that is absolutely true. It is so tempting to water down our faith in the midst of challenge. It's important to be clear and honest and hold to the truth.

But Jesus wants his disciples to be people of truth in all its forms. Jesus says that the Spirit guides us into “*all the truth*.” This isn’t just truth about what we believe. It’s truth in all its forms.

Being people of truth means that we value truth in the public arena whether it is government transparency or international policies. It means that we value truth in our relationships: being honest with how we’re feeling. It means that we value truth for others: wanting our friends to see the truth about themselves and the world.

And it means that we value what could be the most challenging kind of truth: truth about ourselves: our failures, our shortcomings, the motivations we wish weren’t there. If we want the world to know us as people of truth, we could start by confessing.

Jesus says that the Spirit is at work in the background advocating for truth. And we can be a part of that process by embracing truth.

In the face of opposition, we can recognize that deeper issues are at work. Whether we face anger or misunderstanding or indifference, embracing truth means that we can walk alongside people and help them to discover those deeper issues. We can invite them to face their loneliness or their guilt or their dissatisfaction. We can invite them to know the one that helps us to address those issues: Jesus, who will help *them* to address those issues as well.

The Spirit guides us into truth and the Spirit exposes truth in others. In the face of whatever opposition we face, God is always after truth.

Conclusion

Jesus is about to leave his disciples. He knows that he is going to be arrested, abused, and murdered. He also knows that his disciples are going to face something similar if they choose to be faithful to him. So he tries to prepare them. He wants them to look for the deeper issues. He wants them to expect to suffer. And he wants them to embrace the truth that the Spirit reveals.

We started out this morning by thinking about Stephen—the first recorded person who was martyred for following Christ. What’s incredible about his story is that

we find him doing every single one of the things that Jesus invites us to do. Listen to the rest of his story:

But [Stephen], full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” (Acts 7:55–56)

And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep. (Acts 7:59–60)

Stephen did everything that Jesus asked his disciples to do. He expected to suffer. It didn’t seem to surprise Stephen that he would face such persecution. He was prepared for it. He embraced the work of the Spirit even as people were throwing rocks at him to kill him. He was full of the Spirit; he prayed to Jesus, he saw the Son of Man standing next to God.

All of this helped Stephen to recognize the deeper issues. He knew that whatever was motivating this people was their own brokenness, their own fear, their own issues that prevented them from embracing the truth. So he did what Jesus did on the cross. He asked God to forgive them—even as they were killing him. He wanted them to have a chance to deal with the deeper issues that led them to do this.

It is no coincidence that the man who orchestrated his murder ended up being transformed shortly after this scene. Who knows how that scene might have prepared Saul? What we do know is that not long after, he was confronted by Jesus with a blinding vision of the truth. Saul chose to embrace that truth. He chose to follow Jesus.

We aren’t likely to face stoning. But we will face mockery, condescension, lost opportunities and our culture’s version of hate: indifference. Jesus knew that all of this would come and he wants to prepare us for it. He wants us to look for the deeper issues, to expect suffering, and to embrace the truth that the Holy Spirit reveals.

It’s not an easy path, but it’s the best path. When you follow a guy that was hated and murdered, you can’t expect it to be easy. But you can expect it to be worth it.

May God strengthen us for whatever lies ahead.