

# Facing Reality

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*what Jesus does to prepare God's people for God's mission*

John 15:18-16:4a

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When the children were small, sick and in need of a doctor, we would take them to their pediatrician or urgent care. We knew that a doctor visit would bring a certain degree of discomfort to the children. There were shots and swabs and pokes and awkward times. These things were a given. But how do you get the children to the clinic or office when the future looked painful? The counsel we received ran in two but opposite directions.

The first piece of advice we heard I will call the ***facing away from reality*** counsel. This counsel told us to handle the children's fears by basically withholding and distorting information. That is, we were told that to help the children through the inevitable discomfort of a doctor visit one was to talk up the positive things –

“honey, you are sick and need to visit the doctor. He will help you and not hurt you, you will get a sticker and a sucker, they are very nice people, they have toys to play with, you will meet kids your age” (and so on).

This approach apparently was to take the sting out of the painful reality. To trick the thinking into “it's not so bad” so that when they experienced “man that was bad” they would hear “now see that wasn't so bad was it” and the suggested response was to be “no that wasn't so bad” when in fact it was really bad.

The other piece of advice we received I will call the ***facing reality*** counsel. This advice also talked about handling the children's fears but in a different way. This approach was to face reality head on talking with the children about the facts. This option had the parents sit down far in advance from the visit and discuss what will happen –

“honey you are sick and in need help, the doctor will try to help you, there will be a shot and it will hurt, there will be a swab of the throat and that will be uncomfortable, you will be asked to drop your pants and that will be a bit awkward” (and so on).

This approach was to take the child through the painful reality before it happened in order to prepare the child's expectations and draw out questions from the child.

The first approach seemed easier but manipulative. The second approach seemed hard but helpful and true. We chose the latter. And so, we always sat down with our children to give them the grim news that brought about good news. We were trying to prepare them to face reality.

This evening, I want to do just that. I want to sit down with you (so to speak) and discuss with you facts about the future.

Tonight we will listen to Jesus prepare his people for his mission. We will hear him say five truths that will keep his followers from veering from his mission. I preach his words to you so that as we move more intentionally in becoming commissional we will remember these truths and withstand the temptation to either change the message or veer from the mission.

These five truths are seen in our text for tonight. Please open your Bible to John 15:18-16:4a as we prepare our lives in the face of reality. <pray>

## Overview

With his disciples facing troubled times with troubled hearts Jesus took them for a walk in order to give them this talk (see 14:1, 31c; 16:33). This talk to prepare his followers for the future mission can be organized around five basic truths.

### Truth #1 The world hates you. V18-20

To prepare God's people for God's mission Jesus tells them truth #1. ***The world hates you.***

Follow along as I read verses 18-20.

*"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.*

Jesus is just hours from his brutal betrayal and death. He knows his earthly mission is terminating in victory at the Cross. He also knows that he will soon leave them physically in this world - a world that hates him.

To eliminate the surprise factor when persecution breaks out Jesus tells them the truth. The world hates you. (cf. 1Jn.3:13 – do not be surprised my brothers if the world hates you). .

“Hate” is a very strong word. Take a moment to think about what it would look like and feel like if someone “hated” you. What are you noticing? How are you feeling? The Bible talks about this hatred coming from former friends (cf. Matt.24:10) or even from you’re your own household (Matt.10:36). By following Jesus in an obedient way you will be hated by the world. (D.A. Carson’s definition of world in this passage: “the created moral order in active rebellion against God”) .

Now let’s think briefly over the nature of this hatred as seen in v18-19. The essence of these verses tells us that having enemies is not always a bad thing. That we can do every legitimate thing to live at peace with all and still have enemies is made plain in these verses. In fact, if we do not have people who hate us we may be more like the world than a genuine ambassador for Christ (v.19; see also Lk.6:26).

Lovers of Jesus and lovers of people who follow Jesus (cf. v17) are Jesus’ emissaries. They represent him in a hostile world. They do helpful things for their enemies. They speak plainly of his message. They proclaim that Jesus has all authority. They call people to repent and believe in him and become his followers. They will warn people that all who reject Jesus as the eternal son of God who came into this world to save sinners from the just anger of God go to hell. They will describe in matchless categories the breathtaking beauty of the holy Savior. They will demonstrate joy in Jesus as they talk about Jesus and serve those who don’t. And as they increase in the intimacy, love, obedience and fruitfulness that are described in the preceding verses (Jn.15:1-17), they will have the same effect on the world as their master did.

Jesus, in v.20, tells them to remember something. “A servant is not greater than his master”. This saying is taken from John 13:16 (probably spoken to the disciples only 30 minutes or so prior to these words in chapter 15). When facing reality they (and we) are to remember “a servant is not greater than his master”.

This first truth found in v.18-20 prepares us as we approach September and become more intentional in becoming commissional. Following Jesus is moving away from ease and risk-free living and moving toward suffering and risk-taking living. We will be inviting more people to our gatherings. Many will respond negatively. We will have more guests in our classes; some of whom will be unruly and disrespectful and unkind. Our children will not think they fit in to this ministry. Our adults will think the same. We will be more intentional in our serving others. Many of them will be suspicious of our motives. We will invest personal time and money in some. And they will eventually take advantage of us. We may lose friends. We may have family members turn from us. We will have enemies.

Beloved, we must not be surprised at this response. We must prepare our hearts with truth number one: ***The world hates us.***

## Truth #2 The world doesn't know God. V21-24

But why? As we make changes in our hearts, homes and gatherings in order to carry out the great commission, why will people hate us? In v.21-24 Jesus spells out the second truth necessary to prepare God's people for God's mission. This truth explains more fully why the world hates Jesus and representatives of Jesus.

Truth #2 is ***the world doesn't know God***. The cause for the preceding awful reality is seen in v.21-24. Listen as I read these verses.

*But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me hates my Father also. If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father.*

Persecutions turn not on how we do and who we are but on who Jesus is and what he has done. Verse 21 tells us that hatred of Jesus comes from ignorance of God. People do not know experientially God. They are blind, hardened, dead, ignorant, darkened, rebels. They hate because they do not know.

This thought in v.21 expands in v 22-24. As Jesus displayed himself and His Father through his teaching and miracles many despised him all the more. A clear indication of this can be seen in the last part of the first section of the gospel of John. In chapter 12:37-50 the writer of the gospel highlights a main theme of the book. "Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him".

Notice in tonight's passage what they are rejecting. In verse 22 we see them rejecting Jesus' words and in verse 24 we see them rejecting his works.. Jesus makes the point that this hatred demonstrated in rejection exhibits their guilt. Hatred for Jesus deserves profound and permanent punishment for this guilt. Though it is true that no one can believe in Jesus without hearing of him it is equally true that there are those who hear of him and do not believe.

This is why the world hates true believers of Jesus. They simply do not know God. And they hate the words and works of Jesus Christ.

These two truths – we are hated in the world by those who do not know God – are to prepare us for becoming commissional (i.e. future ministry). They are to equip us with knowledge so that we will not be taken by surprise when things don't go well.

### **Truth #3 God's plan will eventually succeed V25**

What does all this hatred ultimately reflect? How are we to interpret the opposition? What is the upshot of all this war? Is God's plan somehow changed or thwarted? How are we to make sense of a mission hindered and harassed?

To prepare God's people for God's mission Jesus tells them the third truth. Look back at the text and listen as I read v.25.

*But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: 'They hated me without a cause.'*

God's redemptive plan is never jeopardized even when the world displays its most egregious and obvious hatred toward it. Verse 25. has to do with how to understand opposition and persecution.

Truth #3 may be summarized by saying **God's plan will eventually succeed**. When His mission carried out by His people is rejected the rejection serves to advance the success of the mission. Through death Jesus accomplishes life.

Verse 25 (and the reality with which we are coming to terms tonight) was taken from Ps.69:4. In that passage we hear the psalmist pleading with God for deliverance from his enemies using imagery of a drowning man. Historically, King David was hunted down by his enemies without cause. A vulnerable king utterly dependent upon God for victory can be witnessed in Psalm 69.

Jesus uses this passage to talk about himself. Jesus as the vulnerable and innocent king is hunted down by enemies and brutally tortured on the cross. But this act of rebellion turns around and brings about total victory for Jesus and his people. God brings about His awesome beauty through their awful brutality.

Thus hatred for Christ/church is not only unjustified but serves to fulfill God's purpose. This hatred brought about the crucifixion and resurrection that fulfilled God's plan. His messengers may be put in danger but His mission is never put in danger. Opposition moves mission forward and fulfills all its purposes.

God's people need these truths in order to not be disheartened and knocked off mission.

### **Truth #4 The Spirit and the Church bear witness of Jesus. V.26-27**

We see that there will be difficult times ahead. We see how God uses the difficulty and fulfills his purposes through them. But how are we to respond to this harsh reality?

To prepare God's people for God's mission Jesus tells them truth #4. This truth has to do with how to respond to the reality of opposition. Listen to the text as I read v.26-27.

*"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.*

How is the church on mission to respond to being hated?

This truth says ***The Spirit and the Church bear witness of Jesus.***

We've been looking at battle. We've seen that there is much pain awaiting followers of Jesus. This message would not be of help and hope if it were not for the third member of the Trinity. Jesus promises his followers that a Helper will come and not leave us alone in our battle.

This Helper is the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of truth. Jesus demands that in following Him we live out the truth and proclaim the truth. We speak the truth in love. And we know that in doing so others will hate us. Temptation likely will be to change the truth in order to grow the church. The Spirit of Truth is with us to witness of Jesus who is the Truth. The Spirit helps us to know the truth, be changed by the truth and speak the truth. We by the Spirit simply tell the truth about Jesus with our lives and our lips. The sovereign God will do with it what He sees fit.

What is our response to persecution as a sent church? Vv.18-25 have insisted that hatred for the disciples is hatred toward the Master. But now in v 26f we see that Jesus is removed from the setting. Does this mean then that the hatred goes away? If Jesus is gone why is there anger?

The answer to these types of questions is found in v26-27. The world's hatred of Jesus continues as it revolves around the question "who is Jesus"? Scores of scholars have different answers to the identity and activity of Jesus. But the Helper who helps God's people gets it right. He testifies about the truth of Jesus. This stirs up an otherwise placid pluralism. People who seem calm and tolerant about the Christ become furious when the reality of the Christ is presented and pressed home. The Holy Spirit and the commissional witnessing community are now the brunt of the world's animosity toward Jesus.

In 16:1-4 John the writer of the gospel describes how the world treats the church. In 16:5-11 we see how the world treats the Spirit. For our purposes we will observe the world's treatment of the church in 16:1-4 and leave the other information for a later time.

This ministry of Spirit-enabled witnessing is always about Jesus; his words and works – who he is, what he came to do, what the cross means, how the resurrection changes all of life, etc. As this gospel "plows" through the soil of humanity, people will end up on one side or the other.

Either people will be inflamed with the Christ and zealously love him. Or they will be infuriated with the Christ and zealously hate him. The Cross brings out this crossroad.

In the remaining verses of this section, Jesus prepares the disciples to face this reality.

### **Truths #5 Believing these truths keeps us from falling away. 16:1-4a**

To prepare God's people for God's mission Jesus tells them the fifth truth. This one has to do with rationale. Why did Jesus tell them these truths? How will hearing these truths and believing them affect us as a missional church? Truth #5 is ***Believing these truths keeps us from falling away.***

The greatest danger we face in becoming missional is not disagreements over music or inconveniences due to scheduling or loss of a friend or even death itself. No, the greatest danger we face in becoming missional is apostasy. It is falling away from Jesus by refusing to suffer for the cause of Jesus. It is beginning to sense the cost of following the Christ and determining that this loss is not worth the risk (cf. John 6:60-66).

For the first disciples the threat came in two ways. 1) Expulsion from the Synagogue. Judaism feeling highly threatened came at the church in the first century with vehemence. (History points to some rabbinic authorities holding to the killing of "heretics" (think Christian) as a form of worship based on Num.25:13) Cf. John 9:22; 12:42; 2Cor.11:24 and the 5x reception of 39 lashes, Acts 7. The second threat for these disciples came in the way of murder. And history bears out that a blood bath awaited these faithful witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus.

The reason why Jesus is so explicit in his teaching on this awful reality is due to the danger of apostasy. He wants the disciples not to be taken aback by this agonizing reality. He wants them not to be surprised by fiery ordeals. This teaching is to fortify and fuel them in the midst of conflict. It is to strengthen them in the face of horrific reality. Jesus rounded off his talk with his disciples by saying "I have said these things to you that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart, I have overcome the world (cf. 16:33).

Having troubled circumstances does not mean having troubled hearts. Believe truth. Trust God. Follow Jesus. These truths tonight are given in order that we will rise to the challenge of becoming missional. And in rising to the challenge we know what awaits. We are briefed over the troubles that arise for those who witness for Christ. But we know that Jesus has overcome the world. His death and resurrection secure our future. He is victorious. We now must walk the path of the cross by enjoying the pardon of the cross so that the path of the cross doesn't crush us. We will be mistreated and ridiculed and scorned and shunned and slandered and opposed. But this will not bump us off course. We will stay the course as we believe these five truths and trust the One who told us the truth (& who is the Truth).

The other month I was talking with a Muslim. He was trying to persuade me that our religions were basically the same. We simply use different words but they describe the same stuff.

I disagreed. I wanted him to hear plain truth that demonstrated how profoundly mistaken he was. I said, "Your religion teaches that you can kill in order to expand your kingdom. Our Savior teaches us that we can die to expand His kingdom".

## Conclusion

Tonight's message was to help prepare us for this mission. It reminded us of 5 truths in which we are to believe. And in doing so we will stay the course and not veer from following Jesus.

This message is a call for each of us to die daily in order to advance His mission. We will need to sacrifice. We will need to suffer. We will need to serve people who may not like us. We will need to be convinced of these 5 truths that will sustain us.

I will close with Jesus' words on what all this may look like for you. . As I put up Christ's words on the screen, think about how we can do these things at the Chapel and around our neighborhood.

Two applications & one exhortation.

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.(Matt.5:44)

The first application to this message is:

1. Pray
  - a. an example is: "Father forgive them for they know not what they do "(Lk.23:34)

The second application to this message is:

2. Love
  - a. Greeting them warmly (Matt.5:47)
    - i. Talk about the "come and see" ministry
  - b. Doing them good (Matt.5:45)
    - i. Talk about the "go and tell" ministry

We are followers of Jesus Christ if we've enjoyed the forgiveness in Jesus Christ.



He says to us "Peace I leave with you. As the Father has sent me even so I am sending you" (Jn.20:21).

For now, we belong in the world but we do not belong to the world. The world will hate us. And we are called tonight to die to self, take up the cross and follow him by loving and praying for our enemies. This truth is preparing us to face reality. We do not need to adjust the message in order to do the mission. We do not need to withhold truth to those who are considering the truth. We speak the truth in love as it has been spoken in love to us. There will be troubled times but our hearts need not be troubled.

Let us as we are becoming commissional,

- **Believe** these truths tonight as preparation for the Great Commission.
- **Obe**y the clarion call to this mission
- **Love** each other in the midst of this difficult mission
- **Determine** to face this reality together for the good of us and the glory of God