

The Upper Room

Sermon #7: Persecuted Aliens

John 15:17 – 16:1

Dr. Matt Cassidy ---- May 7, 2023

If you'll turn in your Bibles, now we'll start our learning time together in John chapters 15 and 16. Here's the theme: plan ahead. To be forewarned is to be forearmed. A friend of mine, a former Marine, said "Reconnaissance is never wasted." We have a phrase in our culture: "Managing expectations." My dermatologist this week said, "Oh, this is going to hurt." She did not disappoint.

The idea here is that there is tremendous consolation in our emotions when our expectations are realistic, so that our hopes are more often realized when our hopes are based on what's true. Many of our adult communities based on the seasons of life (if you attend those) have a prevailing theme of just trying to help you understand what to expect, what's next. Here's what's coming—brace yourself.

John 16:1

"I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away."

In the passages we're going to look at today, that's precisely what Jesus is doing. He's going to come in and say, *Okay, here's what next so that you won't be surprised.* Managing expectations. He says that in chapter 16, verse 1: "I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away." Uh-oh ... what did He say? Why would He say that He's told us these things ahead of time to keep us from falling away?

John 15:18

“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.”

Verse 18 says, “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.” Oh, well there you go. Jesus said, *This is going to hurt. So, it’s okay.*

Let’s look at the passage. I’m going to try and read it through as best I can, and we’ll look at how Jesus is preparing us for what happens when we follow Christ and turn our lives over to Him and He changes our very nature. That’s what the theme is.

John 15:17, 18

“These things I command you, so that you will love one another. ¹⁸ If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.”

Look at chapter 15, verse 17: “These things I have commanded you, that you would love one another. If the world hates you, know that they hated me before they hated you.”

John 5:19-27

“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. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know Him who sent me. ²² 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. ²³ Whoever hates me hates my Father also. ²⁴ 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. ²⁵ But 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. ²⁷ And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.

Here’s the reason they hate Jesus and the reason that we’re going to be hated. Here’s the theme. “If you were ‘of the world,’ the world would love you as its own. But because you are not ‘of the world,’ but I have chosen 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 keep yours as well. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know Him who had sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me hates the 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.’ 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 to me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.”

And Chapter 16, verse 1 says, “I have said all these things to keep you from falling away.”

Certainly, the pervasive theme that’s happening in there is about persecution, but it’s in the context of being in the world or of the world. And when John writes about being in the world or of the world, he’s talking about a system or organization that is opposed to the glory of God. That can be philosophical, it can be emotional, it can be physical, and certainly in the spirit world.

Jesus has been sought after and persecuted since His very birth (when all the babies were being killed because Jesus was born), through His life, and ultimately leading to the crucifixion. And Jesus says, *Look, this is what they did to me. They’re going to do that to you. I have taken you out of the world, and therefore the world is going to hate you. And by taking you out of the world while leaving you here, there’s going to be an anxiousness. Something’s going to happen within you, because now you have a new citizenship in heaven, but you’re still here. You’ll be longing for something more, even if you had everything. You’ll have an anxiety about you, an impatience, a confusion, sometimes.* And Jesus would say, *You’re homesick. That’s just you being homesick. You’re not of the world anymore.* And because of that, He said the world will hate you.

Why Will the World Hate Us?

Why? Why would the world hate us for being out of the world? In this section Jesus is going to give us three reasons. He’s going to say it’s because you now have an alien citizenship with a set of alien values that will incite people. And thirdly, He said He’s going to give us an alien cause. Those are the three reasons He’s going to give us in this passage.

1. We Have an Alien Citizenship

The first one is that we have an alien heart, an alien home, an alien citizenship. Jesus is telling us that our experience with Him, to follow Him, is making a radical change in who we are, who we belong to. He’s saying that becoming a follower of Christ changes the passport of our very souls. It changes who we belong to. And now there’s a restlessness within us. But also, there’s a confusion with people outside that we knew, and now things have changed and there’s something off now. Something is different—Jesus would say, radically different.

There's a wonderful illustration or example of this is Tolkien's four books, *The Hobbit* and the trilogy of *The Lord of the Rings*. And if you remember the story—let me just tell you that, first, you need to know about hobbits—what they live for and their purpose. Here it goes. Never leave the Shire. Never leave the little village. Because your purpose in life, what you live for, is to be merry with your friends as much as possible. Therefore, eat good food as much as you can. Drink and celebrate with your friends as often as possible. Listen, you've got to be safe. Be at peace. Never leave the Shire. Those are the rules.

In the storyline you can see that great wizard Gandalf comes in and all but abducts there few little hobbits from the Shire and takes them on great adventures. If you've seen the DVDs or the videos—I'm sure you've seen those movies, right?—they're about ten to twelve hours, depending on which version you watch—there are many heroic, epic adventures where they save all of Middle Earth. And then in the last movement of the whole sequence of events, you see the hobbits back in the Shire, in the tavern, and everybody's festive, like they always are. But our little hobbits are off to the side. They're talking amongst themselves, and behind them are all their friends enjoying the time. They're back home in their own homeland that fought and nearly died for, but they're not home. Something has changed within them, deep inside. They left the Shire and then lived dangerously. And then they became friends with and fought alongside the elves, near-angelic beings. And then they come back to the Shire that they still love, but they can't call it home. Now they live in this paradox: they're at home but they're not feeling at home. They've lost their citizenship. Their hearts and souls now belong, in the book, across the Western Sea. And their relationships with their friends that they got along with just perfectly before they left are just not the same. They're not in sequence anymore. Something's changed. Something has radically changed.

Jesus is setting our expectations here by saying, *Do not be surprised when you have this alien heart that's causing you consternation now, living in a paradox and even in relationships where you used to be part of that world. And when you were in the world and of the world, they were at peace with you and you were at peace with them. And Jesus now comes in and says, Oh, my dear friends, I hope you appreciate what's taken place within your soul. Heaven itself has been planted within you, and that changes everything. Now you've been taken out of the world. I chose you. You didn't choose me, I chose you. I've taken you out of this world, and now you can't rest like you used to here.*

And your relationships that you had before are like a wheel out of balance. It's just like something is not like it used to be. Others that knew you back when don't know how to respond either. They're sometimes confused. Sometimes they're enraged. So, Jesus is saying this: *You're not that hobbit that you used to be, committed to never leaving the Shire, always being at peace, looking for some kind of prosperity.* He says, *Look, the Spirit of God is within you now.* Jesus says, "I am the vine, you are the branches." The Spirit is now the sap within our souls, and it's running through us. And that Spirit is going to guide us into crazy adventures that will be dangerous and be threatening towards things like safety and security, peace and reputation. Yeah. You're not going to fit in like you used to.

1 Peter 1:1

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces ...

It's a radical change of paradigm in life. The changes are in our meaning and our purpose and in our identity. Peter puts it like this when he writes the first sentence of his first epistle. He says, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces ..." You're an exile, but you haven't left. What changed? My body's in the same place, my heart belongs to heaven.

It says we're aliens, and I have chosen the word "aliens" to mean like space aliens from outside the planet. We're coming in, people do not understand us, and we say, *Hey, I come in peace.* You've seen enough science fiction:

We come in peace.

Kill the aliens! We don't know them, we don't understand them. They're a threat to us.

Because the world says, *If you're not with us, you're against us.* And Jesus said, You're no longer of the world. And so, Jesus is going to say, *Brace yourself. This change of citizenship, this change of nature ... keep in mind that the world hates you.*

1 John 2:15-16

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. ¹⁶ For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world.

And John says we hate a lot of the world. Look what John, the same author—he writes an epistle later—says: “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world.”

You can survey every single book in the New Testament: the four gospels, all the epistles. Twenty-seven different times the writers promise this: *My dear brothers and sisters, manage this expectation. You will be persecuted.* It is a promise. In the New Testament throughout every book: *you don't belong here. And that's going to get you persecuted.* That's the first reason.

2. We Have Alien Values

The second reason Jesus gives is that we have alien values, a whole different set of values. Look what He says in verse 20: “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.”

If they kept my word, they'll keep yours. If they kept my teaching, and you teach my teaching, they're going to keep your teaching. But they hate my teaching.

Here's the alien value. Here's the problem with Jesus' teaching and with Bible revelation itself. It is absolutely authoritative. In Jesus' teaching He would say, “Truly, truly, I say to you ...” This is true truth coming. Sometimes He would say, “You have heard it said ... this is what I say.” When Jesus speaks, He is God, and the Bible speaks God's truth. But it's alien. It's from a source outside the world. And because it's outside the world and outside of space and time, it

says that there's a standard out there. There's a person, there's a deity, that judges and has defined what is right and real and true. And that's not up to us. We submit to those truths. We submit to those standards.

The world's values are committed with a conviction. They have given their life and they've bet their souls' eternal future on this: there are no absolutes. There is no absolute truth, there is no absolute ethic. And they have to hold onto that. They say that there is nothing outside of our own experience, our own mankind, that can tell us, *You are wrong. There's nothing higher than what is right here.*

And Jesus steps in and says, *No, no, I've taught absolute truth. I was persecuted. You're going to teach what I taught—absolute truth. Don't be surprised. You're going to be persecuted as well.*

The world has no place for divine revelation. And so, everything is relative. Not only just ethics, which is pretty obvious these days, but now even truth is relative. You can't even define certain things that you know to be true, because that is subjective as well. And this is how you work in a relative culture: "Fifty-one percent of the people say ...". Or it usually leads to might makes right. Whoever has the power, the most power, they define. They decide what is right and what is real and true.

You can see this played out in various cultures. In the context of the government, certainly communism and socialism and even monarchies, when there's a need for absolute power, what's the first thing that needs to be done? To squelch any kind of debate. You round up God-fearing people that believe in divine revelation—God-fearing Jews and Christians that are going to teach an outside ethic—they're going to judge those people in control—and you round those people up and you give them a chance. You let them reprogram—send them to some camp or something. You marginalize them. You call them names. You make them less than human. And then sometimes, ultimately, you're going to have to destroy them. Because they're bringing in an outside source of what's right and real and true, some teaching.

Even the Nazis—you know this—everything the Nazis did they made legal first. Most of the men in charge who were making the decisions had higher degrees in law or in medicine. So, they knew what they were going to do, they passed a law to make it legal, they did those things. You can see in the book or the movie *The Trials of Nuremberg* that when they're finally brought to be tried for the crimes against humanity, their defense is: *There's no absolute right and wrong.*

It's "might makes right." We were the mightiest, we decided to do these things. The only reason we're being tried is because we lost the war. Don't say there's any right and wrong from outside. We just lost.

So, our culture (let's get away from that—it's easy to blame the Nazis, right?)—look at our culture. What's our absolute standard? Sincerity. And if you argue against anybody's sincerity then we're going to try to reprogram you; we're going to marginalize you and call you names, give you labels, make you less you human; and maybe—I don't know, let's see what happens next.

The point is this: Christianity is always countercultural because Christianity isn't from any culture. It's alien. It's from heaven. It brings heavenly values. And so, when you combine the first two together—that we have an alien home, an alien heart, an alien passport with alien values, what happens is that we won't cherish what the world cherishes. And we won't sacrifice for the causes that the world wants us to sacrifice for. We're not playing well with others. And the world will hate the power of our independence.

I was listening to a great interview this week about a man who was raised in a very progressive home. Both parents were that way. He was a big proponent of large government—large and powerful government to help more people. And when he got into his adult life he started trying to do what he could to help the environment. He did a lot of research, wrote papers. He was an award-winning author in all the right magazines. Then he wrote a book just chasing down the independent facts. And that book didn't go along with the party. It was somewhat independent. And the culture says, *You drink our Kool-Aid—all of it—or else.* And since he wouldn't, let the process begin. They tried to reprogram him. He wouldn't do it. So, then they started marginalizing him. They started calling him names. They de-platformed him. They began to literally censor his work, banning him from various things. And then it got worse, because later on he was asked to oversee some of the investigative research of who was causing this banning, who was doing the censorship. So, he found the original e-mails and it was obvious and without doubt that the United States government was not only funding it, but requiring he and some of his friends to be banned and censored.

So, his value system was blown up. In the interview, a person asked him, "What do you do with all this intense anger and hatred that came at you?" And he said, "Listen. Oh, I became a Christian because, what is the only antidote for that level of anger and hatred? Love. Love and

forgiveness. And what faith tells us to do something like that? Christians. I follow Christ because ... what is faith for if it's not asking us and requiring us to do the impossible? So, I got involved in Christianity. That's why. That's how I did it."

The point is that he is able to live his life and not just reflect back the anger and hatred and not become that kind of person because of his independence; his citizenship and his value system is not from here but from heaven. And they hate his independence because he's not beholdng to anyone but God. That's why.

And it shows up in the world when we find ourselves not beholdng to whatever it is, like the firm. Since the firm isn't the reason we're living our lives, we might miss a promotion. When race isn't the first and foremost thing that we use to identify ourselves, we can't be part of that crowd anymore. When the political party that we associate with isn't first and foremost or the primary thing that we would sacrifice for; if you won't drink the Kool-Aid—all the Kool-Aid—or else.

The world, the company, whatever it might be, can't trust us because that cause doesn't own us. That's why. That's why we're persecuted. We're not owned by those things. And Jesus says, *Look, you used to be owned by those things. I chose you out of that world. And now I own you. Now you're beholdng to no one but me.*

When we become Christians, He changes our identity. He changes our values. And we're beholdng to no one but God. That's how you end up getting persecuted. Jesus is trying to help us understand. He's saying, *I have cut the roots out from underneath all your past idols, all the things that gave you meaning and purpose. I cut the roots even to your race, to your social status, to your political party, whatever it might be—the things that defined you. And I've given you a new definition and a new citizenship. I've given you new values of what is right and real and true. They're absolute. And the culture—the world—will fear that you have no fear but God alone.*

Then when you have that identity in Christ, you can get along with the culture, the world, and eventually you'll find out. In other words, *I know who I am in Christ, and now I'm going to get involved in issues of social justice or the environment, or whatever it might be. Those things that are right and real and true and good ethically, you do those things because of your identity in Christ. But somewhere along the line there will be a moment, there will be a line in the sand when you'll hear, You did not drink the Kool-Aid, did you?*

*No, I didn't. I'm independent of this world. I'm not of this world. They're going to kick you out of the playhouse. They're going to try to reprogram you or marginalize and humiliate you, call you names. Or what's next? That's how it happens. See? It's happening all around us. Jesus said, *Don't be surprised. Look what they did to me. You're going to be persecuted. You're going to be hated, because you're not from here.**

3. We Have an Alien Cause

You have an alien nationality. You have an alien home. You have an alien heart. You have alien values. And the last thing He says is that we have an alien cause.

John 15:26-27

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

Look what he says in verses 26 and 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 to me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.”

The third reason we're going to be persecuted and hated is because we're going to be giving out the good news. It's called good news. It doesn't sound like it, because why would they hate us? Because the good news is this: Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through me.” And that message, when He says that He's giving us this cause and we'll bear witness to Him—that message is not well received for at least a couple of reasons that I can think of.

The first one is that the message of the good news has a terrible introduction. It starts like this. It's a “problem solved” message. And the problem is that you, me—mankind, but individually—are so desperately sin-filled that there is not one thing that we could do that would bring any righteousness to the audience of the holiness of God—not a thing. The Bible says declaratively that the first point in salvation is that repentance is required. That's not a great start. Jesus says that we're salt to the world. And we have a figure of speech: “That's like throwing

salt on a wound.” Well, yeah, why would you throw salt on a wound? Because that’s the process of making something better. It heals. But it hurts. The first part of the message is, *Oh, this is going to hurt.*

The second part of the message is that we’re so sinful that all we can do is claim faith in the promise that Jesus gave us that His death and resurrection would pay all of our debts toward God—all of it—one hundred percent is faith in Jesus alone. And that gives us assurance of salvation. And that can come off as arrogant.

So, you tell me you absolutely know you’re going to heaven? That’s pretty prideful of you.

Yes, I’m absolutely going to heaven, but not because of what I’ve done. I brought sin, Jesus brought salvation, and I’m trusting in that alone. And so, I have confidence, but not in myself, but in His death and resurrection.

And so, listen, here’s a part of it that’s especially humiliating. *So, there’s nothing I can do for salvation that could get me to heaven so that I could say, “Well, I did my part. I mean, I did a little. I’m not as bad as the guy down the street and I did as best as I could.” There’s none of that in the salvation message, the good news?*

Right. The only thing you can ever talk about is how far you have gone from God’s holiness. The good news, the message, is humiliating from the start to the end. You have to acknowledge a debt, a sinfulness that’s so grievous that you can’t do anything about it. And then, even at salvation, you’re bragging only about the works of Christ.

Pascal said, “Too much grace embitters some people.” That’s why people will hate you for this alien message, this alien cause.

Jesus says this good news is going to lead to your persecution. Here’s Jesus’ teaching. Brace yourself, kids, children, my girls, my boys. *They persecuted me; they’re going to persecute you.* I want you to understand that what’s happened inside of your soul has absolutely revolutionized who you are. Now you have an alien home. It’s going to be hard. You won’t feel comfortable here. You’ll feel out of place. You’ll be homesick. You’ll inherit absolute values, alien values. And then you have this alien cause and it’s all going to lead to the world not understanding you at best, and being angry at you. They’re going to call you names. You give money away sacrificially—some of you give money sacrificially to things like The Source, to

your church—what’s that about? *We’re just living for the here and now. Remember, we’re hobbits.*

You’re involving yourself in forgiving your enemies and loving your enemies. Do you know what that looks like? That looks like you’re weak, and people are going to run over you and take advantage of you. And you say, *That’s what they did to Jesus. I’m following Him. He called me out of this world and this world’s system and I’m going to love my enemies and I’m going to forgive them.*

It changes everything. Jesus is telling us that there are consequences for that. It changes our choices.

There’s a beautiful story of two Moravian missionaries in the early 1800s. There was a huge slave colony in the West Indies and they were trying to figure out how to bring the good news of the forgiveness of Jesus Christ, the Gospel, into that slave colony. And these two couldn’t come up with way other than to become slaves. So, they sold themselves into a lifetime of slavery so that they could get moved to the slave camps of the West Indies. Why would they do that? Because they weren’t the hobbits that never left the Shire. They were a different kind of hobbit. They were the ones that were born again, born from above. They had a whole new heart with a whole new set of ethics and values, with a whole new cause. They weren’t living any more for safety and security and glee and reputation. They were living for the glory of God.

Jesus said, *There will be persecution. Embrace it.*

Remember how the passage started? “So therefore, love one another. I command you to love one another.” In the midst of persecution could we just pause and say, *Same team?* Why do we get mixed up on peripheral, this-world stuff and ruin reputations and relationships that have gone on for decades with our brothers and sisters for something as petty as ... fill in the blank. Love one another.

Because you’re going to be persecuted on the outside, I’m going to send you on great adventures. And in these expressions of living your life for the glory of God, I’m not going to make a priority out of your health or your safety or your reputation or your financial well-being. Because this life is very short and this world is really quite small. And you’re not even part of this world. I called you out of that.

Jesus just wanted you to know in the last teaching that He gives to His disciples what to expect next. Me? I'm grateful someone wrote it down, so we can expect this persecution because of this new heart and soul. Enjoy. This is going to hurt.

Let's pray.

Lord, I am grateful that we wouldn't have to be surprised about what's next, and that we have been so revolutionized and transformed. You didn't make us better; You made us new. You made us new citizens of a new place. We long for heaven. And until then, when we see You face to face in that great homecoming, I'd ask that You would cause us to live a life that's dangerously obedient to Your calling in our lives; that we'd follow You wherever You lead us; and that we wouldn't be surprised when our values that are absolute commandments from You come in conflict with the world around us; that that leads to us being marginalized, humiliated, censored, whatever it might be, and we'd consider it a privilege to suffer along with You.

Lord, we're asking that You would cause this church to be a church that looks forward to opportunities to show ourselves out of the world and not in the world. I ask that Your Spirit would convict us of times that we have made our identity in something temporary and petty and so worldly; that we might repent of that and find ourselves drawing near to these truths that You've given us about who we are and what You've made us to be. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.