

## ***“John: Not of This World”***

*Isaiah 66:1-6 • John 15:18-27*

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX  
Rev. Dr. Charles S. Blackshear • January 14, 2024

It may surprise you to hear that today Christianity is the world’s most persecuted religion. According to Open Doors International, a worldwide organization that helps persecuted Christians, there are over 360 million Christians who face high levels of persecution and discrimination for their faith. One in seven Christians worldwide experience persecution. In Africa that drops to one out of every five Christians suffering for their faith in Jesus. And in Asia it’s twice that many. Each year Open Doors publishes the *World Watch List*, a ranking of the 50 countries where Christians face the worst persecution.

In Afghanistan the Taliban hunts down Christians and executes them. In North Korea, the most dangerous place in the world to be a Christian, the penalty is death, either by execution or by being worked to death in a labor camp. More Christians are killed in Nigeria than in all the other counties combined. Pakistan’s blasphemy laws are used to arrest believers and women and girls are often kidnapped and forced into marriage. In Iran the house churches are considered a threat by the Islamist government and if caught they are given long prison sentences. And not far from us in Mexico, the cartels frequently target Christians. They demand that the churches give them money and they often murder the pastors and priests.

This is nothing new. The early church faced persecution from Rome as well as from the Jewish establishment. In this country we are really just beginning to see some early persecution of people for their faith in Christ. We have been protected from that really for the last 1700 years, since the Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity and declared it the official religion of the Roman Empire. But today we live increasingly in a post-Christian culture. The way of Jesus is no longer the dominant force in our society and so we are seeing a growing intolerance for biblical faith. I think we are especially seeing this in the universities.

When we see the stories of persecution or discrimination because of our faith we want to ask why. In today’s passage from John 15, Jesus tells us why. He says, “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...therefore the world hates you.” He then repeats the same idea in verse 20: “If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.” Of course we know that Jesus was persecuted. He was arrested and convicted and executed even though he had committed no crime. Jesus makes the point that this was to fulfill the Scriptures about him: “They hated me without a cause.”

Christians are persecuted by people who hate Jesus. But why do they hate Jesus? Why hate someone who lived 2,000 years ago? It’s because Jesus is God. In verse 23 Jesus says, “Whoever hates me hates my Father also.” When he speaks and when he acts it’s God who is speaking and acting.

I think it’s human nature for us to compare ourselves to others. We tend to magnify the flaws or sins in others while at the same time downplaying our own shortcomings. Even as followers of Jesus we often think, “well I know I’m a sinner but I’m not nearly as bad as *that* person.” But when Jesus came and lived a sinless life, we could no longer feel better about ourselves by comparison. He says in verse 22, “If I had not come and spoken, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin.” Jesus’ words convict us. He shines a light into our own lives and we see how bad off we are. Think about the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5. Jesus says that the law tells us it’s wrong to murder and that anyone who commits murder is liable to judgment. But then he says that if you are angry with a fellow believer you also deserve the same punishment. Anybody here ever been angry with someone? We don’t like to hear that do we? When faced with their

own sin, people who hate God sometimes respond violently.

Then Jesus says that it's not just his words that convict us, it's the "works" that he did. Verse 24 says, "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." The word "works" refers to the miracles that Jesus performed, things that only God can do. He healed incurable diseases like leprosy. He gave a man born blind the ability to see. He raised people from the dead. Jesus is saying that the greatest sin, the worst thing you can do, is to reject Him after seeing the things that He did that prove He is God.

As believers we can experience persecution because we are identified with Christ. In our culture today the idea seems to be that Christianity is tolerated as long as you keep it private and obey the often-unwritten societal rules. If you post your traditional biblical beliefs on Facebook you run the risk of being censored or banned. Essentially, the world doesn't trust anyone who does not conform. That's why Jesus says that "If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own." If you try to look and talk and live like the world that is opposed to God, they will love you. But that's a dangerous way to live because that means rejecting God.

But Jesus says, "you are not of the world." Then he says, "but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." This is one of those clear places in Scripture that show us what's called the Doctrine of Election. Just a couple of verses earlier, in the section we covered last week, Jesus also says in verse 16, "You did not choose me, but I chose you." There is nothing you or I can do to earn God's favor. There's no work you can do to earn your way to heaven. Your only hope is that God has chosen you.

The way God makes His sovereign choice effective in your life is through the work of the Holy Spirit. Verse 26 says, "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." There's a lot in this one verse and we could spend the next hour talking about it without exhausting the depth of meaning. But we'll only spend half that long today.

Jesus is showing us that God the Holy Spirit, who is co-equal and co-eternal with God the Father and God the Son, will come and give us the ability to believe in Christ. He does this in two ways. First, the Holy Spirit bears witness about Jesus by directing the writing of the Bible. As James Montgomery Boice said, "When we speak of the Bible being inspired we mean that in a unique way the Holy Spirit came upon the human authors so that what they produced was what God desired, both in the whole and in its parts." What he means is that God didn't dictate the words of the Scripture to the writers but the Holy Spirit guided them so that the books of the Bible convey the message God wants us to hear, a message that points to Jesus from cover to cover.

The other way that the Holy Spirit bears witness to Jesus is by guiding our minds and our hearts as we read or hear the Scriptures. Any time you understand what the Scriptures are saying, that's the work of the Holy Spirit. If you understand that Jesus is God, that's because the Holy Spirit has revealed it to you. If you realize your sinfulness and that Jesus saves sinners, that's God working in your heart. If you believe that Bible is true, that comes from the Spirit of truth. The word "Helper" that Jesus uses is the Greek word *paraclete*. It means an advocate, someone who comes alongside another. It's the word used for an attorney who stands with you and represents you in court. The Holy Spirit comes alongside you as you read the Scripture and He shows you that it's true.

That brings us to the last thing Jesus says here. If by the power of the Holy Spirit you believe that Jesus is who He said He is, and you believe that He took the punishment for sin that you deserve, and you understand that He chose you to be with Him forever, then you also will

bear witness about Jesus. In other words, you will want to tell others. In Philippians 1 Paul says, "I thank God for your partnership in the gospel." God wants each of us to be partners in his work. Think about that for a moment. The creator of the universe wants you to help with the work He's doing. He wants us to love other people the way Jesus loves us.

This is the hard part. He wants us to love the people who are persecuting us. Jesus tells us in Matthew 5, "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." And the way things are going, we will probably have more and more opportunities to do that in the near future.

*Amen.*