

**Scripture****John 15:18-25**

One of the values that our country is committed to is the **Freedom of Religion**. We believe that all people have the right to worship in the manner that they consider to be appropriate. We may not agree with someone's religious beliefs or practices, but their right to worship should be defended and protected. And as followers of Jesus we expect that our right to practice our faith should be protected and preserved. **That is not a value that all nations and governments are committed to.**

I have a map here that shows some countries in our world where followers of Jesus are restricted or prevented from practicing their faith. (Map was produced by **Voice of the Martyrs**). The countries that appear dark on the map are countries where **Restrictions** are in place impacting the practice of Christianity. Government sanctioned circumstances or anti-Christian laws lead to Christians being killed, deprived of possessions or liberties because of their witness as Christians. The "less dark" countries are identified as **Hostile**. These are Countries where governments may attempt to provide protection for the Christian Populations, but Christians are still routinely persecuted by family, friends, neighbors or political groups because of their witness. While our own nation is not identified as Restricted or Hostile, we have seen incidents of oppression and persecution carried out. A gunman entering a Baptist Church building where worshipers gathered and randomly shooting people. African American Church buildings bombed by radical extremists. A young gunman entering an African American Church where members were gathered for a mid-week Bible Study, and he shoots several of those in attendance. We do not see the extent of persecution that we see in these other Countries, but it is persecution just the same. In the text that we are looking at today, it may surprise us to know that Jesus anticipates that life for His followers would not always be easy. He says that the world will hate us who are followers of Jesus. As we see on the map, Jesus' prediction is fulfilled for many of His followers today.

Before we look at the passage, I want to encourage you to learn about the Persecution of Christians in our world. **Learn so that you can pray** for them. **Learn so that you can encourage our government** leaders to step up and insist on protection. I would suggest to you that you can connect to two organizations that speak up for the Persecuted. You can find their websites and receive resources and emails from them that will keep you informed:

- **Voice of the Martyrs** [The Voice of the Martyrs \(persecution.com\)](http://TheVoiceoftheMartyrs.com)
- **Open Doors** [Open Doors International - Serving Persecuted Christian's Worldwide](http://OpenDoorsInternational.com)
- The magazine **Christianity Today** also includes news stories and articles about persecuted Believers in their bi-monthly publication. [www.christianitytoday.com](http://www.christianitytoday.com)

I know that I need to be more informed, and pray for regularly for brothers and sisters around the world who are suffering for their faith. I encourage you to make that same commitment.

We are continuing our studies today in John 15. Jesus is preparing His followers for living in this world after He returns to heaven. As we read the chapter, it almost seems as if Jesus is just rambling from one subject to another, but I believe that what He is saying is all connected and flows together. Early in the Chapter, we have the parable of the Vine. Jesus affirms our calling to bear fruit while we wait for his return. He encourages us to stay connected to Him, and to remember that we are loved by Him, as He is loved by the Father. We are His Friends! And he reminds us that we must love each other. **Jesus wants us to feel safe and secure as His followers.** Now, we learn why it is important to remember that..

**You will be hated by the world.** Jesus paints a picture of a great conflict that is taking place. On the one side of the Conflict is **God**, and on the other side is the **World**. The word that is translated World can have several meanings in the Bible.

1. It can refer to this sphere that we call, **The Earth**. It is the work of God's creation.
2. The word World can refer to the race of humanity that lives on this earth – **God so loved the WORLD that He gave His one and Only Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.** But the word WORLD has another meaning, which we see here.

3. ***The world is the mass of unbelievers who are indifferent or hostile to God.*** (Expositors Commentary). Gary Burge in his commentary says that ***the world consists of that place – those hearts – where faith is refused and God is opposed.*** Jesus tells us that the devil is the prince of this world. So the world system is a place where evil reigns.

Jesus predicts that this “world”, this system that is dominated by evil will hate us. We should not be surprised by that. There are several questions for us to consider:

**Why we can expect to be hated by the “World”:**

**You do not belong to the world.** When we made the choice to become a follower of Jesus, we made a choice to turn our back on that system that is opposed to faith and God. We have now aligned ourselves with the rule of God in our lives. Jesus has chosen us and called us away from, or out of that system. We cannot be a follower of Jesus and still have an allegiance to the world system.

**The world hates us because it hates Jesus.** Throughout his ministry while he walked on the earth, Jesus encountered opposition. That opposition came primarily from the religious leaders. Jesus tells us that while they appear to be religious and spiritual, they have in fact rejected belief in God. And now he is about to experience the full force of rejection and opposition as he is condemned and crucified. ***“If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.”*** The servant of the Master should not expect to receive better treatment than the Master Himself.

**Why is Jesus hated?** It may seem strange to us to see that Jesus is hated to the extent that He was. He was kind and compassionate. He healed the sick, He raised the dead, He fed multitudes. But **Jesus’ teachings and life are a rebuke of sin.** They are a rebuke of beliefs and practices that the world embraces. And when the world rejects Jesus, it is rejecting God Himself. ***“Whoever hates me hates my Father as well.”*** The world system is in rebellion against God and the One He has sent into the world. The story of Noah in the book of Genesis begins with this assessment of humanity: ***The Lord saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was on evil all the time.”*** (Gen 6:5) God is a God of righteousness, holiness, goodness. But the world system is in a state of rebellion to the character of God. And so the world system hates God and the One He has sent into the world.

As we conclude this study today, we must ask ourselves how we should respond to a world that is in rebellion against God and hates followers of Jesus. We do not experience the hatred of the world to the degree that other followers of Jesus might, but we do have to respond to a world that is in rebellion. We really do not get any advice from Jesus in this passage. He tells us to **anticipate the world’s hatred**, but He does **not tell us how to respond**. I find it interesting to consider what Jesus does NOT say – He does not tell us to engage the world in combat. He does not tell us to engage it “Name Calling” or slander. He does not tell us to take up arms. He does not tell us to Resist or defend ourselves.

So we must look elsewhere to find the answer to our question – How should we respond

- We must take our clues from verses like **John 3:16** which I quoted earlier. In spite of its rebellion and sin, God still loves the world and has sent Jesus to bring redemption and reconciliation to the world. We must love the people in the world.
- Jesus teaches us to “Love our enemies” (Matt. 5:43-46) <sup>43</sup> ***“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor<sup>o</sup> and hate your enemy.’*** <sup>44</sup> ***But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,*** <sup>45</sup> ***that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.*** <sup>46</sup> ***If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?***
- Finally, Jesus Great Commission instructs to ***“Go into the world and make disciples....”***

So we do not align ourselves with the world, but we must interact with people of the world in influence them for the Gospel.