

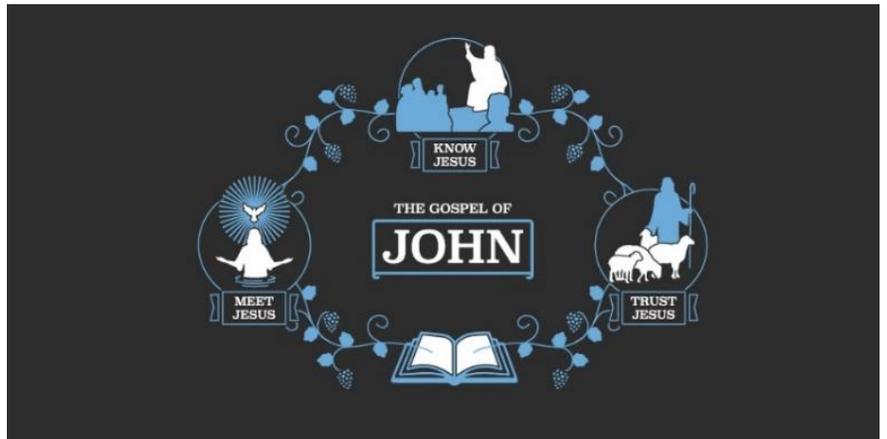


VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Bad Moon Rising The Gospel of John John 15:18–27

Tim Badal | April 24, 2022

Turn in your Bibles to John 15. We're in the series we've entitled simply "The Gospel of John." We've sought to meet Jesus and learn from Him so we can trust Him. We're now in the trusting part of our series. Jesus is in His final moments with His disciples, preparing them for the time when He will no longer be with them.



Jesus wants them to know that what will be happening to Him will also be happening to them. That's important, because after He would leave, the disciples would be confused, not knowing how to respond if He wasn't with them. After all, for quite some time they had been among the most popular people in Judea. As people were drawn to Jesus' miracles, the disciples may have assumed they would always be popular. They disregarded Jesus' mention of hardship. They had also just witnessed His triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, a parade that was held in their honor. All of Jerusalem was talking about them.

However things were beginning to change. Judas had betrayed Jesus. Then Jesus was talking about His life being in danger. If there was any question about what the disciples would be facing in the coming hours, days and years, the answer is crystal clear in our passage today. Jesus actually did not say "if" in verse 18. The better translation is "when." *"When the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you."* Jesus actually used the word "hate" six times in today's passage. He wanted these men to understand how the world would respond to anyone who lifted high the name of Jesus. The disciples had been warned.

Sometimes when I look at headings in the Bible, my creative mind goes places. I would have put as the heading for this section, "Bad Moon Rising." Yes, Credence Clearwater Revival was going through my head as I read this passage. There were bad times ahead for the disciples, as well as bad times ahead for Jesus. Jesus was ready. He was prepared to do the will of His Father in heaven. But what about His followers? Jesus wanted to prepare them as well.

As we see in this passage how the world hates those who follow Jesus, we have to ask some questions. We need to think through how to apply Jesus' words, not only to the people who first heard them, but also to those who would read His words throughout the centuries, those who read them in places other than America, as well as for us reading them here this morning. So buckle your seatbelts because we're about to go on a ride. I think it will be a helpful ride, so I would encourage you to grab a pen and write down some of the things we're going to bring up. These are things you may need to think through in the coming days. People in the first two services said, "Tell the third service people to get ready."

To address persecution in your life, you must ask, "Who is Jesus talking about?"

When Jesus said, "The world hates you" who is the "you"? Is it everybody? With biblical interpretation, we need to realize that the first "you" is the specific audience Jesus was speaking to—the 11 disciples who were left after Judas was gone. They were meeting in a private place just hours before He would be arrested and crucified. He was telling them, probably in the garden of

Gethsemane, that the world would soon be hating them. "Have no doubt about it: you will be hated." But it's not just that they would be hated; there's another word Jesus used in verse 20, the word "persecute." The world's hatred would lead to the action of persecution.

We can throw these words around today, often misapplying them to things going on in our own lives. We have bad things that happen to us, so then we think we're being persecuted. We need to be careful with this. There's a lot of nuance in the concept of persecution.

Jesus was speaking to the eleven, saying, *"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you."* Verse 20, *"If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you,"* referring to the 11 disciples. Was He right about this? Were His disciples hated? It was a pretty big statement to make. Let's see what history tells us about what the disciples experienced.

The 12 men, including Matthias who replaced Judas, all came to a harsh end.

- Matthew was impaled by a spear in Ethiopia.
- James, the son of Zebedee, was thrown off a wall and clubbed to death.
- Jude was crucified by magi in Persia.
- John, the writer of this Gospel, died in exile on the island of Patmos, after horrific beatings and abuse.
- Matthias was stoned and beheaded.
- Phillip was hung by iron hooks upside down.
- Peter, one of the most well-known of the disciples, was crucified upside down by either Caesar or Nero.
- Thomas was stabbed with a spear in India.
- James the Lesser, as he was called, was beheaded in Palestine.
- Simon was crucified in Persia.
- Andrew, Peter's brother, was crucified on an X-shaped cross in Greece.
- Bartholomew was whipped to death in what is modern-day Turkey.

We can heartily say that Jesus was 100% correct when He promised them the world would hate and persecute these specific disciples. But His promise needs to be expanded, because the Bible wasn't just written to these few people. John actually wrote his Gospel with his first-century audience in mind. Remember, John tells us there were lots of things he could have written about but he chose to focus on the particular things Jesus said that his readers would need to know. So why near the end of his life did he think these warnings were important to include? He realized that those who would read his Gospel in the first century would be hated and persecuted by the world as well. His words would not have been a hard sell for his early readers.

The persecution of Christians started of course in the life of Jesus Himself. Herod the Great heard that the King of the Jews had been born in Bethlehem, and his response was the slaughter of all the boy babies. That was the first persecution that took place because of Christ. Persecution continued when Annas and Caiaphas handed Jesus over to the Roman officials for crucifixion. They hated Him and wanted Him dead. Then after Jesus' resurrection and ascension, His followers began to tell everyone they could about Who Jesus was, then as a result Stephen was martyred for his faith. This was followed by the persecution and execution not only of the disciples, but of many other first-century Christians, under Nero and Domitian. In fact, tens of thousands of believers lost their lives in those early years.

Most of the readers of John's Gospel in that day personally knew people who were persecuted or had experienced it themselves. John had a disciple by the name of Polycarp who was probably with John when this Gospel was written. Perhaps 80 years after that, Polycarp was set on fire in the Roman Colosseum. Jesus was right when He told His disciples the world would hate them, then John affirmed that those words would be applied to many who lived after them.

Now let's fast forward 2,000 years and ask, "Is Jesus also talking to us?" We might think that because we're technologically more advanced and sophisticated, even more tolerant, this kind of persecution is now outdated. But in fact some 340 million Christians currently live under the threat of persecution every day. Of the 200 plus countries in our world, about 145 countries are hostile toward Christianity. About the 38 of those countries have been classified as most dangerous to Christians in our day. Of these, 17 are especially likely to persecute believers. Basically, one out of eight Christians alive today lives under the very real threat of

persecution for their faith. Jesus' words—"The world will hate you..."—were true then and they're true for the majority of Christians living today.

Let's focus now on our situation in America today. Is persecution taking place here? In 1776, a group of men thought they could form a better government than had ever been formed before. One of its components was freedom of religion. You and I have enjoyed this blessing that allows us to safely do what we're doing here today. I'm thankful for that and we should all praise God for this every time we meet. After all, 340 million Christians weren't worrying today about whether they would find a parking space for church on Sunday; they were not worrying about someone following them and turning them in. In our country, our Constitution codifies the right you and I have to worship untouched by the government. While we are enjoying this wonderful grace, we also need to realize it wasn't promised to us for the rest of our lives.

I'm not trying to be a boogie man. I'm not trying to scare anyone, but we do need to remember that our experience is the exception. I would imagine that the devil hates the freedom we have and will do everything he can to remove it from us. Here's his idiocy. He wants to get rid of our freedoms, but think about what happens every time persecution comes to Christians? The church grows. Therefore we need to ask ourselves if our definition of persecution and hate is accurate. Let's look at some nuances by asking what persecution is not.

1. Disruptions in our lives are not persecution.

You lose your job, you get turned down for a loan, you fail at a business endeavor. These things often happen to Christians and it's a sad situation. but it's not persecution. You got turned down for a job because your references said you were lousy at punctuality. Maybe being turned down for a loan has to do with your credit score and not where you attend church.

Think about Abraham in the Old Testament. He was an incredibly faithful man but notice how many disruptions he had to face in his life, often because of his stupid decisions. They did cause disruptions in his life, but God worked with him through all of that and the Bible never uses the word persecuted to describe Abraham's life.

2. Afflictions in our lives are not persecution.

We often suffer trials and tribulations and we might be tempted to see them as persecutions. It might be a medical situation or a relational issue. Bad things are going to happen. A whole book in Scripture describes the tribulations of one man—Job. If anyone has been afflicted in this world, it was Job. But Scripture never says he was persecuted by other humans. Something bigger was going on, but it was not persecution.

3. Opposition in our lives is not persecution.

You might have an enemy at work, in school or in your neighborhood, maybe even in your family. You might have rivals in a competitive context. You might have gotten into a verbal fight or even a physical altercation. Another person may want to harm you, take you down, even kill you, but that doesn't mean they are persecuting you. It just means you have an enemy. This person might not like you because you've done something to them, or you might just be a victim of circumstances.

Consider the life of Joseph. He experienced opposition from his own brothers due to jealousy, envy and a toxic family environment that produced real abuse. But Joseph wasn't being persecuted in the sense Jesus was speaking about.

So if persecution is not disruption or affliction or opposition, then what is it? It's the systematic mistreatment of an individual or a group of individuals because of their Christian faith. Consider what Jesus says in John 15. Persecution came first to Him. "They persecuted Me and now they're going to persecute you." In other words, people will beat at the Vine, then because we are connected to the Vine, we will feel those beatings as well. People will seek to cut the Vine and when they do, we'll feel it as well as branches attached to the Vine. Persecution comes when the hardships we encounter are specifically because of our connection to Christ.

This persecution might come in the form of physical abuse, such as torture, rape, mutilation, destruction of property, imprisonment or death. But it can also take the shape of societal discrimination, including family excommunication, loss of job or income, loss of friends, the inability to marry and the prevention of education.

Some of you who came to know Christ as adults have lost friendships. You had to decide to follow Christ or follow your friends. Some of you have lost romantic relationships because you've chosen Christ. That is a level of persecution, because you've stood for what Christ has called you to even when it's costly. Some of you have lost jobs because you've decided you aren't going to steal or cheat. When confronted with these choices, you've said, "As a Christian I cannot do this." Persecution specifically has to do with your connection to Christ.

We need to be careful, because if we use the term persecution too freely, the world will become irritated at us. Someone wrote in *The Atlantic* about what they called the "evangelical persecution complex." They referred to how Christians call foul every time we encounter hard things. In some ways the accusation does apply, even if we don't want to admit it.

So how do we distinguish what real persecution is? Many of you are thinking, "I realize we in America are not experiencing the persecution that believers in other parts of the world are facing, but even if we aren't dealing with what they're dealing with, or with what Jesus and His followers did, sometimes it sure feels like the hatred of the world is growing." How many of you would agree with that? Do you wonder what's going on?

One thing that has helped me understand what's currently going on has been something called the "five stages of persecution." This provides a narrative to what we might be sensing, giving words to our experience. Hopefully this could also help us avoid the evangelical persecution complex and not call something persecution when it really is not.

1. Stereotyping.

According to the author of these five stages, the first step is being stereotyped. In our world, it comes primarily through the media. In various forms of media, Bible-believing Christians are caricatured as "Bible thumpers," or "simpletons," or "haters of science," things like this.

If you've ever watched "The Simpsons" on TV, you know Ned Flanders. Ned was the world's definition of a fuddy-duddy Christian. We laugh at him and might even be thinking of Christians like him. But at the end of the day, the characterization of us is that we're weirdos. It might seem to be benign, but this is the starting point.

2. Vilifying.

Then as the stereotyping grows in intensity, where their faith is not accepted, Christians begin to be seen as more than just wacky, but as intolerant, hateful or bigoted.

3. Marginalizing.

If the process continues, the next step is marginalization of Christians. I love America, because so far what we're doing today cannot be touched. To be sure, we did experience some government intrusion during Covid, but for the most part it stays out of our regular assembling together. There were a few radical mayors who made decisions, and there were some court cases, most notoriously against Grace Community Church in Los Angeles. But John MacArthur and his congregation won a number of times in court. Overall we are still able to worship as we please. But as the world begins to marginalize us, they will begin to say, "You can do this here, but you can't take your ideas out there." They will allow us to sing our songs, pray our prayers and talk about Jesus, but we need to keep Him at the corner of Route 47 and Bliss Road. We aren't supposed to bring Him into the corporate world, our schools or any other place. It's okay to be a Christian in private, but you're not allowed to bring it where it might impact others. You're probably experiencing this kind of thing.

4. Penalizing.

The next stage will be penalizing. This becomes more serious. Jobs might be threatened. People are getting cancelled, to use our new vernacular. There are increasing pressures to toe the line or else. I need to be honest with you. I'm a businessman, serving in community events. I'm also on the board of education. I'm in the world. If you don't know me well, I don't want you to think that as a pastor I don't have to deal with these things. I will tell you in the realms of business and schools, I have not yet encountered any sort of penalties. But I did encounter something as a pastor.

Years ago, Governor Ryan asked me to give an invocation for a dual session of our state legislature. I had done this before and it was a joy, so I agreed to do it again. I never used it as an opportunity to beat up our politicians; I only wanted to pray a blessing over them. The second time, I introduced myself to the Speaker of the House and told him I had been invited by the governor. I told him I was excited about the opportunity. The Speaker responded, "I see that you're from a Bible church. You're an evangelical. I don't want to hear the name Jesus." He was holding my hand and squeezing it. "I would highly recommend that you not bring up the name Jesus in your prayer. I'm Jewish and that's an affront to me." After that we had a wonderful and lively conversation.

I explained that as a Christian, my greatest desire was to bless them as our leaders. I told him I wasn't going to do anything to use that platform in an unbecoming way. Then I told him I would be praying in the name of Jesus and I was sorry he didn't like that. Because it was public, our church was able to watch it. I mentioned Jesus a handful of times, as I normally would, and I could hear him grunting behind me. He was doing that to pressure me, letting me know how angry he was. This kind of thing will become more and more common in the future.

Maybe you will never encounter this in your life, but this sort of criminalizing is increasing. It could come just on the social level, but it can sometimes happen in a legal context as well. We don't hear a lot about that, because our Constitution has held strong for many years.

5. Extermination.

Then gradually the Christian presence in our nation is being exterminated. Christians will be exiled or imprisoned for long periods of time. We may be beaten into submission through threats of violence. We may even lose our lives. We're seeing this take place all around the world. After the Iraq war had ended and ISIS regained power, some of the most horrific stories of Muslim extremism took place in Iraq, a place near to my heart. There Christians began to run for their lives. Some of them had their children kidnapped, even babies, only to be boiled alive. They were then given back to their parents on a bed of rice, telling them to curse God or die. These are horrific stories.

That's why I think it's offensive for us to use the same word, implying that just as these people are being persecuted, so are we when we post something on Facebook and got some nasty responses. It's not the same thing! We need to be careful to recognize these realities. Are we feeling pressure? Yes, of course. And yes, we need to respond.

To address persecution in your life, you must ask, "What causes these types of troubles?"

We find the answer to this in our text. Actually, the text speaks for itself: we're going to be hated and here's why: because the world hates Jesus. Why would they hate Him and therefore hate us because of Him? Jesus tells us in verse 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."*

It's not that people were innocent; it's that they remained ignorant. When Jesus came into the world, He exposed their sin and they didn't like that. If you're going to expose people's sin, they aren't going to like it. We need to realize that the gospel message calls people to repent. They need to do a 180 turn from the way they're living and go in the exact opposite direction. Basically, when you present the gospel to someone, you're telling them their way of life is wrong and hell-bound. They're loving their life. It's their best life now. They're thinking, "You have the audacity to tell me I'm on my way to hell? Who the you-know-what do you think you are?" They're not going to like you. They're not going to throw parades for you. If you are preaching Christ, inevitably the world is going to come after you, because they did it to Jesus. We need to realize this. Jesus reveals their sin to people.

But it's important to never forget that we were once where they are. We were once ignorant too. Someone had the strength, courage and audacity to tell us, "Stop living in your sin and turn to Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sin." And by the grace of God, you did that. So before you start demagoguing these people as evil individuals, recognize that you were once there and you would still be there if wasn't for the grace of Jesus Christ.

Trouble was prophesied to come. Psalm 69:4 says there will be *"those who hate me without cause..."* Jesus had done nothing to these people but show them the way to eternal life. This means the way of the Christian is to live like Jesus, so that when they persecute you, they do it because of Christ's message, not because of you. So where does that leave us?

To address persecution in your life, you must ask, “What steps need to be taken?”

If the world is going to hate us, what do we do? As a Christian in the world, I love what Jesus says in our text: *“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.”* In other words, we’re hated because we’re following Christ. Does that mean we should find a big ranch in Montana, live off the grid and never be heard from again? No.

Jesus tells us—and His disciples would say to us as well—that even amidst persecution, we should live like Christ. So let me give you a few takeaways here. In a world that hates you, remember how you need to respond.

1. Expect to be hated.

Maybe you’re not being hated right now—praise God for that—but I would ask is it because you’re a friend of the world? If you live for the love of the world, you’ll experience the wrath of God, but if you live for the love of God, you will experience the wrath of the world. In John 16:33, Jesus tells us, *“In the world you will have tribulation...”* That word can also be rendered persecution. *“...[B]ut take heart; I have overcome the world.”*

2. Be exemplary in following Christ.

In 1 Peter 2:12, we read, *“Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us”* (NIV). You need to live an upright life, but the world will hate that.

This illustration may frustrate some of you, but your pastor has been to parties where people have been drinking enough to get drunk. Maybe you have as well. What I’ve come to realize as a non-drinker and a non-drunkard is when I’m in those scenarios where people are drunk, they don’t like sober people. The reason is because drunk people do drunk things and they don’t want sober people to remember those things the next day. There’s an uneasiness when we don’t join them in their sin. I tell them, “I’m not a drinker; I’m a follower of Jesus Christ.” But it doesn’t matter; my decision not to drink is a problem for them. Amanda and I have both noticed that when this happens, we’re the odd ones out, not falling down and doing crazy things.

That’s a picture of what our relationship with the world is like. We’re a sober people living in a drunken world. People will think we’re the ones with the problem. “Why are you walking straight?” The world will struggle with it. This doesn’t mean we should start drinking with them. It doesn’t mean we should start cutting corners. You need to be the best employee you can be. You need to be the best student you can be. You need to be the best neighbor you can be. You need to be the best person, even when you’re accused or persecuted for what you do, The Bible says they will glorify God when they see your good deeds.

3. Endure hardship like a good soldier.

Buckle up. Paul says in 2 Timothy 2:3, *“Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.”* It’s a war out there and we need to be ready for it. Maybe it’s not a challenging war front for us yet, but we’re still in a battle.

4. Eliminate self-induced trouble.

Here’s a big one: eliminate self-induced trouble. Some of you are thinking you’re being persecuted for your faith, but let me tell you this in all humility, it’s because you’re being a jerk. You’re not a very nice person to be around. You’re not everybody’s friend at work and it’s not because of the banner of Christ you’re carrying. You’re a Christian who doesn’t play well with others.

I will tell you that some of my most heart-breaking moments come when I see some from my own church folks post on social media something that leaves me wondering, “What in the world are you thinking and doing? You’re creating a war that doesn’t need to happen.” This is not what God has called us to, but some of us are convinced we can win an argument, even when we shouldn’t be arguing at all.

My dad always told me, “If you get in a fight with a pig, you’re both going to get muddy but the pig will like it.” That just blew right by some of you. “Did I just get called a pig by my pastor?” No, but there are some of us who need to eliminate self-induced trouble. We’re creating our own problems and making enemies, when that doesn’t need to happen. You’ll have enough enemies just by being a Christian.

5. Exercise your rights as a citizen.

This one is really important. Exercise your rights as a citizen according to Romans 13. As Americans, we have rights and we need to utilize them. We need to uphold religious freedom. There are legislators here today who will be available for you to meet with. They want to help us support the issue of life in the face of the travesty of abortion in our state and in our country. We have rights as citizens and we need to take advantage of them as best we can. We must do it in submission to the laws of the land, but we still have many things we can rightfully do.

6. Educate yourself on the persecuted church throughout the world.

Even more important, we should educate ourselves regarding the persecuted church around the world. There are links below to help with this process. Maybe this week spend less time on social media and more time learning some of the stories about people who are living beautiful lives of faith in times of terrible turmoil and tribulation.

Matthew 5:11-12 says, *“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you”* (NIV).

We have a lot of thinking to do and I pray that no matter what happens in the days to come—in the good, the bad and the ugly of life—that we will remain in Christ for His glory and for our good.

Further resources to learn about the persecuted church around the world:

- www.opendoorsusa.org
- www.persecution.org
- www.persecution.com

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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