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IF THERE’S CILANTRO IN THE GUACAMOLE…

John 15:18-25

INTRODUCTION

On November 11 the undefeated University of Washington Huskies were playing a very good University of Utah team. Washington had hopes of completing an undefeated season, winning the last Pac 12 championship ever, and getting into the four team college football playoff. Late in the game Washington was ahead 33-28, but Utah had the ball and had driven deep into Washington territory. If they could score a touchdown, that would put them ahead and possibly ruin Washington’s hopes of that undefeated season. But quarterback Bryson Barnes’ pass toward tight end Dallen Bentley was a little off the mark. Bentley stuck out a hand trying to make a one handed catch, but he only deflected the ball. It ricocheted right to Washington linebacker Alphonzo Tuputala, who took off toward the end zone at the other end of the field. He ran 77 yards into the end zone, scoring a touchdown that would make the score 40-28, icing the game. Or at least he thought he had scored. He was pumped about making an interception and returning it for a touchdown and got excited about celebrating. One problem. He began his celebration a bit too early and dropped the ball on the 5 yard line. He didn’t score a touchdown at all because he didn’t carry the ball into the end zone. Several of his teammates, including Elijah Jackson and Dominique Hampton, ran right past the ball that was sitting there on the 1 yard line, intent on joining in the celebration. Michael Mokofisi, Utah’s 330 pound right guard, never gave up on the play. He chased Tuputala the entire 77 yards even though he had absolutely no hope of catching him. But as he arrived at the end of that long run he saw the ball just sitting there on the 1 yard line and fell on it. The celebration in the end zone went very quiet when the Washington players learned it was Utah’s ball and that no touchdown had been scored.

As it turned out, the play didn’t make a difference in the outcome of the game. Washington still won that game and finished the regular season undefeated, then on Friday night they beat Oregon to win the Pac 12 championship. However, I am sure the Washington coaches drove home to Tuputala a crucial lesson. Scoring the touchdown is what matters. The celebration is not. He lost sight of what really matters in a football game. I suspect he’ll never do that again. Today I want us to all think about what is most important, not in football, but in life. Jesus will say some things that bring up this matter in John 15:18-25.

“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. **19**If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. **20**Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=john+15&version=NIV#fen-NIV-26720b)] If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. **21**They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me. **22**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. **23**Whoever hates me hates my Father as well. **24**If I had not done among them the works no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. As it is, they have seen, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. **25**But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: ‘They hated me without reason.

EXPOSITION

JESUS WAS TREATED ABOMINABLY

1. In verse 18 Jesus said, “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.” In verse 20 he said, “If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.” The grammar in Greek indicates that what Jesus meant was, “Since the world hates you, then keep in mind it hated me first.” Verse 20 states, “Since they persecute me, they will persecute you also.”
2. This is the core message of these verses. It starts with the idea that the world hated Jesus and persecuted him. That’s an understatement. They didn’t just persecute him a little. They rejected, mocked, tortured and crucified him. Crucifixion was intended as a deterrent. The English word “excruciating,” a description of the worst imaginable pain, literally means “Out of a cross.” Crucifixion was horrifying. It was literally torturing a person over a long period of time until they finally died. It was designed to be so awful, so incredibly painful, that it would serve as a warning. It was so bad if you ever saw a person crucified you would make sure you never did anything that would have a chance of causing you to say to experience that.
3. We had a tough week in our family. Sunday 7 year old Ella was having a horse riding lesson when the horse suddenly spooked and as Laurie described it, went full rodeo on Ella. The horse bucked her off and then stepped on her. Poor Ella ended up in Children’s Hospital with a lacerated kidney. She’s home and fine, but it’s been a tough week. Then when Toby was changing 2 year old Bria’s nose she apparently objected and kicked out and hit Toby right in the nose, probably breaking it. Oddly Laurie and I have had the same thing happen. We’ve had the appearance of “floaters” and flashing lights in our vision. My problem is my mother once had a detached retina. I saw what she went through with several surgeries. I want no part of that. So I ended up on Friday at the eye doctor having an appointment that lasted more than 3 hours as they thoroughly examined my eyes. I got the all clear result I hoped for, but seeing what my mom with through was the deterrent for me. I want to do everything possible that I don’t have to deal with that. Crucifixion was intended to have that kind of effect multiplied by a bunch.
4. It is appalling that Jesus was subjected to such horror. What did he do to deserve such horrific punishment? He never defrauded anyone, never scammed or stole money or anything else from anyone. He never abused or injured anyone. He certainly never killed anyone. He never plotted a rebellion against any rulers. What did he do that was so awful it deserved the hatred of his contemporaries to the extent that they demanded that he be subjected to the worst the twisted minds of that day could think of? What was so bad, so repugnant, that he had to be tortured and executed in the most extreme way imaginable?
5. In Matthew 26 Jesus was brought before the high priest and the ancient Judean equivalent to the Supreme Court. Jesus did some sparring with the chief priest and then the priest said to him in verse 63, “I charge you under oath by the living God. Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.” In other words, no more dancing around. Do you claim to be the Messiah or not? Jesus answered in verse 64, “You have said so. But I say to all of you, from now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.” This was a reference to a prophecy from Daniel, and what it meant was, “Am I the Messiah, the Son of God? You’d better believe it, and you can bet the farm on that one.”
6. That was Jesus’ offense. You can see the reaction in verse 65, “Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, “He has spoken blasphemy!” In verse 66 he said, “What do you think?” and the rest of the court answered, “He is worthy of death.” Then they spit on him and began mocking him and hitting him.
7. My question is, should claiming to be the Son of God be worthy not just of death, but of scorn, mocking, torture and the worst imaginable method of execution? The only reason they settled for crucifixion was they couldn’t think of anything worse.
8. If someone came today and claimed to be the Son of God, how would you react? You’d think the person is nuttier than Daffy Duck. You might think he is in desperate need of help from mental health experts. You might pity him. But you don’t think, “This is the worst person who has ever lived and he needs to be killed in a way that will cause him the maximum pain possible.”
9. I realize that we can’t relate to first century Jewish religious experts. We don’t understand the depths of their commitment to their theology and their Law, nor do we feel the outrage they felt. Still, doesn’t this seem to you to be extreme? Doesn’t it suggest that maybe there were other motives at work there than just the theological issue?
10. The fact is that Jesus was perceived by those people as a threat to their beliefs, their way of life, and especially, to their position and power. That could not be allowed to stand. It had to be stopped, and it had to be done in a way that would send a message to any other people who might want to do the same thing so that they would never attempt it.
11. The bottom line is that the hatred Jesus faced, the fate that was forced upon him, was blatantly wrong and unfair. It was, in fact, the most unfair, horrifying thing that has ever happened in history. The reaction against Jesus was so extreme it was downright irrational.

JESUS FOLLOWERS SHOULD EXPECT SIMILAR TREATMENT

1. Jesus said if they hated him, and they did, and if they persecuted him, and they did to the extreme, then those who follow him should expect to receive the same kind of treatment.
2. I have mentioned many times that I have a big issue with cilantro. It astounds me that people like the stuff. To me, it tastes terrible. There are others who agree with me, and some say it tastes like soap. I don’t know about that because I’ve never eaten soap and don’t know what it tastes like. But it couldn’t be any worse than cilantro. Not only does it taste bad, but it is powerful. If there is a little bit of it present in a dish the whole thing has that awful cilantro taste. A frustration for me is that many people put cilantro in their guacamole. I love guacamole. Would you be surprised to learn that I don’t love guacamole if it has cilantro in it? Of course not. For me, it doesn’t taste like guacamole, it tastes like cilantro. The cilantro taste, even a little bit of it, pervades if it is in the guacamole. So why am I talking about guacamole? Because the world hates Jesus more than I hate cilantro. I avoid cilantro, but I’ve never tortured it. So if a person has even a little flavor of Jesus, how would you expect the world to react to that individual? The more that person has the flavor of Jesus the more the world will him them.
3. Paul stated plainly in 2 Timothy 3:12, “Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”
4. I recently read an article that said all the branches of our military except for the Marines are having trouble meeting their recruiting goals. Because the job market has been so tight and because only 23% of young people meet the minimum qualifications for service, it’s been tough for them to get recruits. They all have recruiting mottos. For the army it is “Army Strong,” for the Air Force it is “Aim High.” The Marines have the familiar, “The Few, The Proud, The Marines,” and of course they also have their famous “Semper Fidelis.” My problem is that Jesus’ recruiting motto leaves a lot to be desired. According to these verses it is something along the lines of “People will hate you.” Yeah, where do I sign up for that?
5. Jesus has been proven correct. The International Society for Human Rights recently said that 80% of all acts of religious discrimination and persecution in the world are directed at Christians. We all have heard a lot about the fact that the Jewish people have faced persecution throughout their history. But recently Jewish rabbi Yitzchok Alderstein wrote an article in which he posed the question “Are Christians the new Jews?” He essentially answered yes.
6. Vivian Prodan lived in Romania which was a communist state ruled by a brutal dictator, a regime that did everything it could to stamp out Christianity. Nevertheless, Vivian, who had become a lawyer, encountered a believer in Jesus who had peace and joy that she wished she had. Though that person she became a believer in Jesus. She began defending Christians who were charged with crimes simply for living out their faith. She became a target. She was kidnapped, bullied, pushed into traffic, often her tires were slashed, she was beaten by the secret police. Late one night a large man came to her office ostensibly to discuss a case. But when he sat down across her desk from her, he pulled out a gun, aimed it at her and said, “You have failed to heed the warnings you’ve been given. I am here to finish this. I am here to kill you.” She sensed the Holy Spirit prompting her to share the gospel. So she said, “Have you ever asked yourself why you exist?” She went on to tell him about Jesus, and as she did so he seemed to become more and more calm. Finally, he said, “You are right. The people who sent me here are crazy. I do need Christ.” He told her he would come to her church as a secret brother in Christ. Then he walked away. He would later go to seminary.
7. That kind of persecution is not something that only happened in the past. In his book, *Eveything Sad Is Untrue*, Daniel Nayeri tells the story of his mother, who was a doctor in Iran. She had prestige, wealth and position. But she became a believer in Jesus. She was forced to flee from her life there, leaving millions of dollars, thousands of acres of land, her family and her home. She came to the US to live as a refugee. Daniel says, “She’s poor now. People spit on her on buses. She’s a refugee in a place where people hate refugees. And she’ll tell you, it’s worth it. Jesus is better.”
8. Here we might run into a problem because we don’t feel like we’re persecuted. We don’t face anything like what happened to Jesus, or to Vivian Prodan, or what Mrs. Nayeri has gone through. However, the world’s hatred and persecution comes in many forms.
9. In Matthew 5:11 Jesus said, “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.” He said sometimes the persecution will be dangerous or costly, but other times it might be just hurtful. It might come in the form of people insulting you are falsely speaking evil of you.
10. My freshman year in college I had the classic introductory English Comp class. I got a decent grade in the class, but looking back on it I realize I missed a lot of what the prof was trying to help us get. One piece of literature we studied was a poem called *The Love Song Of J. Alfred Prufrock*. I totally did not get the poem, but I know now that it is considered significant in the shift from Romanticism to Modernism. It was written by the famous British writer T. S. Eliot. Something I didn’t know about Eliot was that he was part of a group of writers and intellectuals known as the Bloomsbury Group. But Eliot became a believer in Jesus. His group responded with shock and disgust. The writer Virginia Woolf was kind of the leader of the group. When it became known that Eliot had become a Christian she wrote a letter to a member of the group and said this, “I have had a most shameful and distressing interview with Tom Eliot, who may be called dead to us from this day forward. He has become a believer in God and immortality and he goes to church. I was shocked. A corpse would seem more credible than he is. I mean, there’s something obscene in a living person sitting by the fire and believing in God.” No one threatened or physically harmed Eliot, but he certainly experienced persecution in the form of ostracism and criticism.
11. Courtney Ellis went to a prestigious grad school in English. She said there were many times when her fellow students openly ridiculed the name of Christ. Most of them were ignorant of who Jesus is and had never met a Christian. They assumed all believers were uneducated, judgmental stereotypes. She said she stayed silent out of fear of what would happen if she stood up for her faith. As time went on she felt more and more guilty over her cowardice. Then one day a fellow student asked her point blank, “Are you a Christian?” She took a deep breath and then said yes. The other student said, “Interesting. I always though that Christians were like circus freaks, but you’re actually kind of smart.”
12. Laurie and I got a very tiny taste of this kind of persecution a few years ago. During the pandemic shut down as you recall, we were not allowed to have in person worship services. So we put out an on line equivalent of a service. Laurie, Jerry and I, along with Kyle, our youth pastor back then, would do some songs in our garage, and then I would preach a sermon in our living room. When we did that we would open our garage door and do our songs using our sound system so others could hear it. Every Sunday a few of our neighbors would sit on the curb to listen. We got positive feedback from lots of our neighbors. Just a couple of weeks ago one little girl asked Laurie, “When are you going to do the music again?” But it turned out not everyone was good with it. One Sunday while I was doing my sermon in the living room the doorbell rang. Laurie answered it as I went on and found a police officer on our porch. He said that a neighbor had called to complain. He was a bit confused because at that time it was just me talking in our living room, but Laurie explained it to him. He said, “Yeah, we’re getting a lot of complaints about churches having worship services outside.” He basically said we should do what we could to keep the sound level down. But then that same neighbor complained to our Homeowner’s Association. It became apparent that this neighbor’s complaint was not really about being disturbed by the sound, for there were other events even more noisy that she had no trouble with. It wasn’t the level of our music that was the problem for her, it was the content. We told the HOA we would do whatever they decided. If they wanted us to shut it down we would. They discussed it and basically came back saying, “What you’re doing is fine.” They let the neighbor know that as well. They got that her problem was with the content, not the sound, and that was her problem, not ours.
13. Yeah, that’s really small potatoes when it comes to persecution. It doesn’t feel like it even qualifies. But the point is that if you follow Jesus and don’t hide that fact, someone is not going to like it. You likely will be criticized for it, might be insulted, disliked, or even face some of the more ominous forms of persecution.
14. Isn’t this a little difficult understand? The Bible says that God has put everything under Jesus’ feet. He rules over everything. That being the case, why does following Jesus mean you’re going to be persecuted at least in one way or another? Why would God have a system in the world that punishes those who follow him? That makes no sense.
15. Essentially this is one of those “Why does God” kind of questions. We know that in the end we will have to admit we don’t know unless God specifically tells us why. In this case, he has not told us, so I can’t have a definitive answer.
16. Not long ago I had a brief conversation with our 4 year old grandson, Wesley. This was around the time we had some rain, and in this conversation he endeavored to explain why it rains. I don’t remember exactly what he said, but I do recall that he wasn’t close. He doesn’t have enough knowledge and ability to comprehend a complex system like weather patterns yet. That didn’t stop him from trying.
17. When I address a question like why God would allow a system where the people who are faithful to him are inevitably persecuted, I realize I’m a little like Wesley. I don’t have the knowledge and ability to comprehend what God does and why, and my speculations on the topic probably get about as close as Wesley’s meteorological musings. That doesn’t stop me from trying, just like it didn’t stop him. I know, you might say, “Myatt, if you can’t swim you should stay in the shallow end of the pool, so why are you wandering into the deep end of the theological pool where you are way over your head?” I guess my answer is because I’m a fool and I don’t know better. In my defense, I insist I’m not a true fool. The biggest problem of a true fool is he doesn’t know he’s a fool. I’m very much aware of my foolishness, and thus much aware that my thoughts may not get close to the truth. However, there are some things that I know are true.
18. The first is something that we saw at the end of John 14, that there is a spiritual war going on in this world. Satan is real, and he is fighting against God with all his might. Those who side with God are going to be targets for his attacks. What we learned when we thought about that war is that right now Satan is called the “god of this age.” We saw that he is in control of much of the human race and of culture. That means that those who believe in Jesus are going to be attacked. If you walked out on to a football field while a football game is going on, would you be surprised if someone smacked into you and knocked you down? You shouldn’t be. That’s what goes on in a football field. And what goes on in this world is a spiritual war in which followers of Jesus should expect to be under attack from many angles. When you’re in a football game they say you need to have your head on a swivel because you can get hit from any angle. So it is with the spiritual war. One of those angles will be persecution.
19. I know, that kind of begs the question that we started with. Why does God let Satan run loose in this world and do so much damage? Again, in the end I have to say I don’t know. But there is a truth that at least plays a part in this equation. There is a Korean baseball player who will be available to Major League teams beginning this off season. His name is Jung Hoo Lee. He is an outfielder who has terrific stats as a hitter. But there is one snag. The pitching in the Korean professional baseball league is not quite as good as the level of Major League pitching. One big component of the difference is velocity. The velocity hitters here must face is greater than in Korea. Probably the Padres best player this past year was Ha Seong Kim. But his first year here he struggled with the bat. He couldn’t catch up to the fastballs he saw here. He has improved every year. Right now Jung Hoo Lee is working hitting off pitching machines that throw at much greater speed than anything he’s faced. He’s making hitting much harder than it has been for him. The only way he can improve is to face tougher pitches. He will get better by doing something that is harder for him.
20. There is a principle there that we all know and don’t like much. The only way we get better is by doing hard things. Consider your muscles. How do they get stronger? They have to face resistance and be broken down so they can build back up stronger. Could it be that God allows his people to face persecution because that is how their faith is made stronger?
21. I don’t think those make up the total answer. But we don’t know the final answer to why God allows the system that is in place. We don’t have to know. What we can know is that Jesus knew all about it. He says in these verses that he told his followers about the persecution because he didn’t want them to be surprised. It would have been really tough if Jesus didn’t warn them about what was coming, then he rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, gave them the Holy Spirit and they thought everything was going to go great, then the persecution began. He wanted them to know he knew all about it so they should not be surprised by it. He wants us to know the same thing.

IMPLICATIONS

DON’T EXPECT FOLLOWING JESUS TO BE EASY

We need to remember that we are in a spiritual war. War is never easy. It is terrible and incredibly hard. We should not be surprised by that. One aspect of that war will be persecution.

The British magazine *The New Statesman*, which is described as politically left of center, published an article by Cristina Odone, who is a former editor at the magazine. In the article she said she was invited to speak at a conference on marriage that would be held at the Law Society in London. She said the conference was a chance for supporters of traditional marriage to contribute to the debates about marriage. The title was “One Man, One Woman: Making the Case For Marriage For The Good Of Society.” She said she accepted without a second thought. A few days before the event the Law Society called and said they were not going to let the conference meet on their premises because it was “contrary to our diversity policy.” They regarded support for traditional marriage as discriminatory. The organizers found another public building where they could meet. But 24 hours before the conference the organizers were denied the use of that building as well, as the topic was “inappropriate.” Again diversity policy was cited. When asked for a copy of that policy the building owners refused to provide it. The conference did go on in the basement of a hotel finally. Odone concluded that Christians are no longer free to express their beliefs. She said, “Intolerance is now state sanctioned. When it comes to crushing the rights of those who dissent from the new orthodoxy, public leaders are in the forefront of the attacks, not the defense.”

That’s our world. We should not be surprised by that. Jesus warned us about this a long time ago.

WE MUST DECIDE WHAT MATTERS MOST

James 4:4 says, “You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, whoever chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy against God.”

There’s a lot packed into that verse. Friendship with the world is a powerful magnet pull us in. Who doesn’t want to be liked? Who doesn’t want to have approval? Who doesn’t want to be accepted? Who doesn’t want to be seen as successful by everyone? We all want that. The problem is, those desires exert a powerful pull on us. But those are the kinds of things James described as “friendship with the world.” He says if you choose that, you become an enemy of God. That’s because you are choosing to please and gain the approval of people rather than God.

Notice that this is not a new problem. James called his audience “adulterous people.” The reason was they were choosing the world’s way. They were caving in to the pressure, and in so doing they were becoming opponents of the Almighty God. We can do the same thing very easily. The effects of our culture and the opinions of others are powerful on us.

What matters most to you? Is it pleasing God, following Jesus, becoming like him, or is it friendship with the world? We need to think about what price we are willing to pay to follow Jesus. Are we willing to follow him even if it means opposition, scorn, rejection? It is helpful to remember that Paul chose to follow Jesus, no matter what. In 1 Corinthians 4:13 he tells us where that led him. “We have become the scum of the earth, the garbage of the world.” For him, following Jesus was worth losing everything and becoming the garbage of the world.

There is a second century letter written most likely by a man named Athenagoras, called Epistle To Diognetus. In the letter he described Christians. He said they dress and speak like everyone else and do not practice what he called “any eccentric way of life.” In other words, they’re all pretty normal and a lot like everyone else. But then he said this of them, “Though destiny has placed them here in the flesh, they do not live after the flesh. Their days are passed on earth, but their citizenship is above in the heavens. They obey the…laws, but in their private lives they transcend the laws. They show love to all men, and all men persecute them. They are misunderstood and condemned, yet by suffering death they are quickened into life. They are poor, yet making many rich, lacking all things, yet having all things in abundance. They repay curses with blessings and abuse with courtesy. For the good they do, they suffer stripes as evildoers.”