

## SCUBA DIVERS John 15:18-6:4

Humorist Dave Barry wrote that at one point he realized he needed to have a serious talk with his son. He said every dad needs to have this talk but many avoid it because it is so awkward to talk about. The subject of the talk is buying gifts for the women in one's life.

He said the first rule of buying gifts for women is that the gift should not do anything, or if it does, it should do it badly. He wrote, "Let's consider two possible gifts which, theoretically perform the same function. Gift One: A state-of-the-art gasoline powered lantern, with electronic ignition and dual mantles capable of generating 1200 lumens of light for 10 hours on a single tank of fuel. Gift Two: A scented beeswax candle, containing visible particles of bee poop and providing roughly the same illumination as a lukewarm corn dog. Now to a guy, Gift One is clearly superior, because you could use it to see in the dark. Whereas to a woman, Gift Two is MUCH better, because women love to sit around in the gloom with reeking, sputtering candles and don't ask ME why."

I think he's right. For instance, most women love jewelry. This is a problem for me. I go into a jewelry store prepared for the worst, then see the prices and find out I wasn't even close to prepared because it's much worse than I feared. Look at anything with a visible diamond on it and be ready to suffer a sudden coronary event. And what do these ghastly expensive items do? Nothing. Wear them on your finger or arm or in your ear lobe. They don't do anything.

Nevertheless women in particular seem greatly enamored of these little do nothing baubles. I want to talk about a gift today. Not just a gift for a woman, but a gift for all of us. However, this particular gift is one you likely don't want. This gift might seem to be in the category of the lawnmower that a friend of mine years ago gave to his wife on their anniversary, which is to say a gift not gladly received. Hopefully though as we think about this dubious "gift" we can find some reason for being willing to accept it. We will learn about the gift in John 15:18-6:4.

### PREMISE: THE WORLD WILL DESPISE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS

This passage has one main message and you get it right up front. "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first." Oh, well, this doesn't apply to me because who would ever hate me? To know me is to love me, right? Why would anyone ever hate me? Uh, my fellow Jesus follower I've got some bad news for you about that "If." The Greek language had several forms of conditional or "if then" statements. Verse 18 is what is known as a first class conditional statement. It meant, "If, and it is so." In other words, you could translate this, "when the world hates you, keep in mind it hated me first." Not if, but when. It will happen.

This theme is repeated throughout these verses. At the end of verse 19 Jesus said, “That is why the world hates you.” In verse 20 he said, “If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.” In 16:1-2 he says, “They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God.” Jesus was absolutely right. Of the eleven men who were present when he said this, ten would be killed for their faith, and the other would be tortured and exiled. Men like Saul of Tarsus would later believe they were doing God’s work when they hounded, abused and even executed Christians.

The Marines have as a slogan “The few, the proud, the Marines.” The Army has “Army Strong.” The Navy advertises itself as “a global force for good.” Jesus has a slogan too. It is, “Follow me and people will hate you.” That’s just awesome. Makes you want to run right out and sign up, doesn’t it?” Don’t you feel like saying, “Uh, Lord, could we maybe send that slogan back to our PR firm and ask them to come up with something a little more inspiring?”

Given what was about to happen it makes sense that Jesus told his men this. In 16:1 he said, “All this I have told you so that you will not go astray.” In other words, he was preparing them because some harsh things were going to happen first to him and then to them and he didn’t want them to be surprised when it happened. He repeated that in 16:4. “I have told you this so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you.”

Suppose you must have a medical procedure performed, perhaps a knee reconstruction surgery. Would you prefer that the surgeon just do the surgery and tell you nothing about what will happen afterward, or do you want him to tell you what to expect as you go through the recovery process? Either way the process will be the same, so it doesn’t matter right? Wrong. We all want to know what to expect. If the doctor doesn’t prepare you then you will be constantly worrying that something has gone wrong, that you’re not healing properly or that you’ve reinjured yourself. Knowing what to expect somehow makes it easier to prepare ourselves for it and to not freak out as we go through it.

That’s like what Jesus was doing for his men. They were going to face stuff that is as hard as life can dish out and he wanted to prepare them for it. He didn’t want them freaking out and fearing they were doing something wrong. He didn’t want them thinking that God had abandoned them or that somehow God had lost control of events in this world. He wanted them to know that it was part of the plan.

Well yes, but didn’t this just apply to those disciples? They were the ones who would get thrown out of the synagogues and martyred. Unfortunately the Bible gives the same message to us. 2 Timothy 3:12 says, “Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” This wonderful slogan of Jesus’ wasn’t just for the first disciples, it is for “everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus.” You likely

won't face the same level and lethality of persecution that those guys did, but live for Jesus and somebody won't like it.

Now this is a little mystifying. Why should people despise us? In 15:27 Jesus said, "you must also testify" about him. Jesus called on his followers to tell people about him. We call that evangelizing. But the word "evangelize" is actually a transliteration of a Greek word, meaning we essentially have taken it right out of the Greek language with some minor changes. In Greek it is *euangelizo*. The second part, *angelizo*, means "to proclaim news." The little *eu* tacked onto the front means "good." So it means "to proclaim good news." Telling people about Jesus is telling them good news. Not just good news, but great news, news of great joy the angels said. It says God is real, that he loves us, and that he has acted to rescue us for eternity when we were helpless to save ourselves.

What kind of reaction would you expect if you tell people good news? If someone showed up at my door with a camera crew to inform me that I had just won \$10 million in the Publishers Sweepstakes how would I react? I would jump for joy. I for sure would not despise that person. I would hug the life out of him. So why would people despise someone for telling them the good news of Jesus?

#### WHY WILL THE WORLD DESPISE US?

It will despise us because it despised Jesus. Jesus said in verse 18 that the world hates us because it hated him first. If you follow Jesus and become like him and the world hated him, it is also going to hate you. It is no secret that I don't like cilantro. To me it tastes a little like soap. Here's the scoop: I hate the taste of soap. It doesn't even have to be Lifebuoy like Randy hated in *A Christmas Story*. If cilantro tastes even a little like soap to me I won't like it. If the world hates the taste of Jesus and you taste even a little like him, it's not going to be very fond of you either.

Have you ever noticed the world's reaction to Jesus? In his day they put him on a cross, but they still don't like him today. In many quarters you can talk about God generically and not ruffle too many feathers, you can talk about many religious philosophies, but if you start talking about Jesus you're going to get a reaction. Sometimes people will say that they admire Jesus, but they only admire a Jesus of their own making. They might like a sanitized version that has been edited to fit their own prejudices. Straight up Jesus is more than they can handle.

Consider the curious case of the late Tim Tebow. Okay, he's not dead, but his football career is. He played in the NFL where there is a lamentable record of people being arrested for DUI's, assaults, domestic violence, where there is a culture of bullying and crude language, even drugs and cheating. In that milieu Tebow was humble, had integrity, always encouraging of his teammates, was the kind of person that if you learned your daughter was dating him you would be thrilled, and if your son grew up to be like him you'd be happy and proud. This guy was controversial! He was criticized by some.

Why? What did he do that was troublesome? He was outspoken about following Jesus. That's it. It was enough.

But this begs the question “why?” Jesus didn’t come here to attack anybody. He didn’t come to steal from anybody or harm them. He came to serve and to give himself up. Why would anyone despise him for that? Why does the world hate Jesus? Jesus caused people to react against him because he was ***an affront to their pride*** and because he was ***a threat to them***.

In Luke 4 Jesus returned to Nazareth after being away in the wilderness for 6 weeks. He was invited to read the Scripture in the synagogue. He read Isaiah 61:1-2 which spoke of the Messiah. In verse 21 he said “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” He claimed to be Messiah! Then he said that the people of his hometown would not receive him and pointed out how God had blessed Gentiles through prophets in the Old Testament, implying God would do that again through him. In verses 28-29, Luke says, “All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff.”

Some of their reaction was to his claim to be Messiah. He was just the kid down the street, the woodworker’s son. How could he be anything special? He made our dining room set. Excuse me, but how is he any better than any of us? But the real offense was to suggest that God might choose to include Gentiles and not them. That was so offensive to them they wanted to kill him. Their pride was at stake.

The religious leadership of Israel had the most severe animosity toward Jesus and led the effort to kill him. Here’s why. In Matthew 23:5-7 Jesus said of the Pharisees and other religious experts, “Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them ‘Rabbi.’” They wanted to be somebody. They wanted to be respected and honored. In their culture the way they did that was by being the most religious. That is pure pride.

In John 11 Jesus raised his friend Lazarus from the dead. People began flocking to him. In verses 47-48 here’s what happens. “Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. ‘What are we accomplishing?’ they asked. ‘Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.’” Do you see anything wrong there? Here’s this guy performing miraculous signs right and left. They admit that. Don’t you think the reaction should have been, “we’d better listen to this guy and get behind him because he clearly has the Lord and his power with him”? Are they worried about whether Jesus might be right? No, what they are worried about is

their own power and position. They're afraid people are going to follow him, not them, and they will lose the place of honor and prestige they have. Jesus was a threat to them.

The religious leaders understood that Jesus was undermining their whole approach to God and to life. If people decided he was right, they were also deciding that the religious elite were wrong. Jesus exposed the leaders' sin and their hypocrisy, which would also embarrass them and lead people to not follow them. Jesus was a threat to their lifestyle because he might cause them to lose position, respect, power and their ability to make money which they also loved (Luke 16:14). That is why they reacted so violently to him. They were defending their turf and hanging on to their pride and power.

But what does this have to do with us? We are not attacking anyone's position or power. Why might people react negatively to a follower of Jesus today? The mechanism is different, but the reasons are the same. We are an affront to their pride and a threat to them.

You believe that Jesus Christ is the way the truth and the life. This implies that anyone who doesn't believe as you do is both wrong and in peril of being rejected by God. That idea is offensive to people. They bristle any time someone tells them are wrong about anything. But to be wrong about something as important as that really raises the hackles. Then the idea that they might be condemned by God, to even hint at such a thing is deeply offensive to most people. Tell them this is just what you believe and what they believe is just as valid and they won't much care about your beliefs. That won't bother them, but any hint that they might be perilously wrong is anathema.

Your beliefs and your life especially can shine a light on things they want to keep in the dark. In other words, you can make them feel guilty and people don't like that at all. It is a terrible affront to their pride and they react to it. One of the best stories about this I've ever encountered involved Billy Graham. A particular professional golfer was put on a foursome for a round of golf with Graham. The pro had a terrible round. He couldn't do anything right and looked almost as bad as your average public links duffer. Later a friend said to him, "Man, you were just awful today. What happened to you out there?" He began turning the air blue with swear words, saying, "How am I supposed to focus on my game with that bleeping Billy Graham constantly preaching his bleeping religion to me the whole time?" He went on in that vein for some time until he ran out of steam. When he was finally calming down his friend asked, "Wow, Graham was really rough on you huh? What did he say to you?" The pro sighed, shook his head and admitted, "Actually, he didn't say anything at all." It was just his presence that made the guy feel condemned because there was stuff in his life he felt guilty about.

The fact that you believe there is a personal just God, that there is a life after death and that there will be a judgment represents a threat. If God is just, then he is going to hold us to account for our choices in life, and people don't want that. In his book, *Ends and*

*Means*, Aldous Huxley, British writer, admitted that he did not want a world with meaning, with God as a judge because, “a meaningless world frees me to pursue my own erotic and political desires.” Thomas Nagel, professor of philosophy at NYU wrote, “I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn’t just that I don’t believe in God...It’s that I hope there is no God. I don’t want there to be a God.”

Most people do not want moral accountability. If there is a God they want him to be a sort of neutral force that will accept anything and everything from everyone. That way they don’t have to answer to him. Unfortunately Jesus talked a lot about judgment. Our faith makes people uncomfortable because the idea that God knows all about it and is going to deal with it is a real threat.

Jesus also said that part of the reason we will be despised by the world is that we are not of this world. In verse 19 he said, “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.” Strangely people react still today to something that is different, to something they don’t understand. You are not of this world if you believe in Jesus, and that unsettles them. People tend to react to what they don’t understand by at best being suspicious of it and at worst attacking it. That’s human nature.

How are we different? Sometimes Christians get focused on all the wrong things. They think the difference is that we go to church, don’t use bad language, don’t go to bad movies, don’t have the bad habits they do and party like they do. I believe that God wants us to be a part of a church, I know he doesn’t want us to dishonor him with awful language, he doesn’t want us to pollute our minds with filth or to throw our lives away in partying. But none of those things will especially be a threat or an affront to people. Mostly they will just make them think we’re weird and cause them to be glad they’re not us. Imagine going every Sunday and having to listen to this guy preach at you. Who wants that? So I think we can be safe in assuming that this is not what being not of this world means.

We believe that freedom is found not in total autonomy but in obedience to God. We believe that the way up is down, that the way to greatness is through humility and service, not through accomplishment and the acclaim and approval of others. We live by grace and relate to people with grace, which the world does not comprehend at all. We live for eternity, not for this age.

Let me give you an example of how weird we should be. Envision a Christian who starts a new company. In the first year it struggles but survives. In the second year it actually turns a small profit, but at the beginning of the third year it catches fire. It takes off and produces big profits. Along comes a big conglomerate that buys our brother out for \$100 million! His Christian friends congratulate him and say "God has really blessed you!" But

he is not of this world. He sees it differently. He says, "My soul is in peril! Pray for me, for I am being seriously tested. I fear losing my passion for God. I am anxious to give this money away as quickly as possible."

He's right. In Matthew 19:24 Jesus said it is "easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." In Luke 6:20 Jesus said, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." In Luke 16:13 Jesus said "You cannot serve both God and money." 1 Timothy 6:9-10 says, "People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction." James 5:1 says, "Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you." Please pray for my soul. Do you think the world would understand any of that? That's being "not of this world."

## IMPLICATIONS

### KNOW WHAT'S AT STAKE

I said earlier that this is kind of the gift no one wants. Who wants to be hated? However, there are reasons to accept this "gift" gladly. Acts 5:41 is a puzzling verse. The apostles were arrested and tried. Some wanted to kill them. More moderate voices prevailed though, so all they did was flog them and threaten them with worse. How did the apostles respond? They "left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name." They were rejoicing because they had the privilege of being hated and mistreated for following Jesus. Philippians 1:29 says, "For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him." Literally "it has been graced to you." Doesn't feel like grace, does it? How is suffering rejection and persecution a good thing?

James 4:4 says, "Don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God." You want people to like you? We all do. No one likes being despised. But we need to understand that trying to get people to like us is the same as hating God! Who do you want to please, the people around you or God? God says you cannot do both! That's why this is a gift. It draws the lines clearly for us. Will you choose to please God if it means incurring the displeasure of people?

What we forget is the world system is a tool of Satan. Its thoughts, its values and its approval are weapons he uses to ruin us, to cause us to separate from God, to go our own way. The reason being despised by the world can be a gift is it makes the issues clear. It forces a choice on us. I can either be patted on the back and accepted by the world because I fit in perfectly with it, or I can walk with God and receive the world's animosity. We must understand *any choice to go with the world eats away our soul.*

Satan has this system. It tells us, “get along, be popular, be accepted, don’t ruffle feathers, just fit in and do what everyone else does.” It causes us to pursue what the world pursues and make choices the way the world chooses. It causes us to chase things that we think will make us happy because we’ll have what others want and they’ll accept us so we won’t be ostracized or rejected, and somehow we end up feeling empty, confused, restless, distant from God and lost. This “gift” God has given us sharpens our vision. We see the choice we have before us. One way is hard but yields peace, joy and love, the other is the easier of the two, feels good briefly, but ends with unhappiness and emptiness.

I don’t like making choices. Going out to eat at a restaurant always introduces stress for me. I’m going to have to choose what to order, and if I choose poorly I end up with food that I am disappointed with. It’s after church and I have to decide between having something from the breakfast menu, like an omelet or scrambled eggs and bacon, or something from the lunch menu such as a sandwich or burger. The problem is I can’t eat it all so I have to decide. And to decide in favor of one is to decide against the other. If I say yes to sandwich I say no to scrambled eggs, and with that I forego a pancake I might have with it as well. We have a choice day in and day out like that. Am I going to choose to win the acceptance of the world, or am I going to align myself with Jesus? To say yes to one is to say no to the other.

I propose that we become like scuba divers. A scuba diver for a time lives in an undersea environment. But unless he is a total idiot he never forgets that he does not belong there. He is going to be in that world for a brief time before he goes back where he really belongs. Yes, he certainly is functioning in the environment, but if he breathes it in he will die. He must always know that it is a dangerous place for him, full of threats. But if he operates wisely in that environment always alert to the threats, while he is there he can survive and do many things. So it is with us in this world. We are only here for a brief time. It is a dangerous place. We do not belong here, but we can function here as long as we don’t breathe in the environment.

#### BE SURE THE REASONS ARE RIGHT

I have known people who hated Christians, but it wasn’t because the Christians were so much like Jesus. It was because they deserved the disdain people had for them. I’ve known Christians who are unloving, insensitive, boorish, condemning of people they deem not to be as good as them or to be real “sinners.” There’s nothing holy about being a jerk. I’ve known Christians who talk a great game, but when you scratch deeper than the surface you find they’re mostly passionate for their own gain. I’ve seen them go to war with a brother in Christ because they wanted more money or they wanted their way in the church. The world has the right to despise us when we are like that. Colossians 4:6 says, “Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.”



Do you ever think you've never really been hated or persecuted so maybe there is something wrong with you? You want to live godly in Christ Jesus but haven't been persecuted? What shall we think about that? First understand that we can be overly literal at times. Paul's statement that all will be persecuted is not to be pressed to mean that no Christian will ever live without being severely persecuted. He meant that the general experience in this world for Christians will include being hated and rejected at some level. There could be exceptions. Some persecution may be quite low level.

Second, remember that we live in an unusual bubble in history. If you lived today in much of China, North Korea, many nations in the Middle East, just as you live today with no change whatsoever, you would be in for some serious rejection and possible persecution. Just be who you are right now and you would face some scary stuff. But one other factor is that sometimes we become a little bit too much like our world. They don't hate us, because they think we're pretty much like them. The more we're like Jesus, the more they'll hate us.

#### ANSWER THE CALL

The Marines are looking for a few good men. The Army wants people who desire to be not just strong, but Army strong. Jesus issued a call here. Are we willing to answer knowing that if we do we will be despised by the world? It is likely that in the years ahead this is going to be a very real issue for us, for it is likely to become more and more difficult to be a follower of Jesus here.

The question is how far are you willing to go in following Jesus? His first disciples were told point blank they were going to be hated and even killed. They did the math. How much was it worth to them to be loyal to Jesus? Would they follow him if it meant ridicule? If it meant rejection by family, friends and their culture as a whole? Would they follow him if it meant they would be ostracized, have possessions taken from them, were subjected to abuse, have their freedom taken away and even have their own lives taken away? They answered the call. They were willing to go all the way. Their initial steps were faltering. They failed later that night, but their failure was not final. To a man they answered the call and suffered for it.

We are inspired when we read Acts 4:13. Peter and John were being essentially tried by the leadership of their country. In that threatening situation here's what happened. "When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus." We think that's what we want. We want people to take note that though we may be ordinary too, we have been with Jesus. But here's where it gets sticky. They paid a price for that. They both endured serious persecution and Peter was killed for his faith. ***The more you are like Jesus, the more likely the world will hate you.***

How far are you willing to go? In China there's a man named Alimjan. He married a woman named Gulner and they had two children. Several years later he was arrested. The government confiscated everything they own. He was accused of "harming national security" and of using his business as a cover for preaching Christianity. In January 2008 he was convicted and sentenced to 15 years in prison. He is now in prison being badly treated, his wife and children are struggling to survive and after being pressured by authorities have had to move to a different town. Pastor Gajjal Paul in India, after being severely beaten because of his faith and sustaining terrible injuries, while recovering said, "It is my responsibility to preach the gospel, and I will continue doing it. Even if I die, I will die for the Lord."

On today's football helmets there is a sticker. It reads, "No helmet system can protect you from serious brain and/or neck injuries, including paralysis or death. To avoid these risks, do not engage in the sport of football." Wow. No one would be willing to play that game after reading that, would they? Paralysis or death? No thank you! And yet there is no shortage of young men eager to don those helmets and take that risk. Are we willing to risk for something far greater, for the kingdom of God, for the Lord who died to save us?

How far will you be willing to go to follow Jesus? Are you willing to be different? Are you willing to be weird, radically weird in the eyes of the world? Are you willing to be not of this world? To pursue God's kingdom over money, success, approval, fame, power? To live not for safety, comfort and popularity in this life, but for the next age and its values? Are you willing to be despised, ridiculed, even rejected? This is the challenge that Jesus gave us. In the end we must never forget, the choice is between life and death, but the life comes through taking the harder road and being willing to pay the price.