

Persecution and Joy

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, thanks Amy, and great to see you this morning. Please do keep that passage open in John chapter 15. My name is Graham, I'm the pastor here at the church, and it's lovely to welcome you today.

Particularly if this is your first Sunday with us, know that you are so welcome, and we would love to serve you in any way that we can, so please do hang around, we'd love to get to know you. And John chapter 15, the second half, into our WhatsApp messages, what WhatsApp messages kind of week that it's been, let the reader understand.

Here's what Jesus wants us to know about him today. He wants us to know that he's a king who's hiding absolutely nothing from us.

There are no hidden terms and conditions. There's no small print that he really hopes that we don't see. He's full disclosure. And he's full disclosure, particularly when it comes to the reality of what life is going to be like if we decide to follow him.

Now, it was Chris Martin from Coldplay who sang this, As of my childhood, Dude, nobody said it was going to be easy, but no one said it was going to be this hard.

[1 : 2 0] Do you know the feeling in life? There's all sorts of things, aren't there, that leave us thinking, if only we'd known. Right? If only someone had warned me that this was going to be that difficult before I got so far down the track and I figured it out for myself.

How many of us have got DIY projects sitting at home where we said just that? And yet Jesus, I want you to know, dear friends, isn't one of those people. He wants us to know exactly what it's going to be like if we choose to follow him.

He's full disclosure today. Full disclosure. And so in John 15, if we take in the two halves of it, we get so clearly, probably more than anywhere else in the whole Bible, we get the paradox.

That word, just two things that we don't think go together, but they do. We get the paradox that's right at the heart of the Christian life. If you follow Jesus, these two things are true.

That Jesus is the place where true and lasting joy are to be found in this life.

[2 : 3 0] That there is no greater thing to live for and know as we live our lives in this world than him. And yet following him puts us on a direct collision course with the world who will hate you for what you believe and what you stand for.

So Jesus isn't like the captain in the cockpit saying, on this flight, we may experience some turbulence, but for the majority of it, it's going to be nice.

So why don't you sit back and relax and enjoy the flight? Jesus is much more like the army general who's speaking to his troops seconds before they are about to go over the trenches.

And here are the final words. And he says to them, this is going to hurt. And with that, can I just say I'm reminded of two reasons why I find in Jesus, or I find Jesus rather, the most endearing of leaders.

And I'm reminded of the brilliance of him that has attracted billions throughout the world today and down the generations, convinced them that he is worth following.

[3 : 49] Firstly, because he tells me it's straight. Follow me and the world will hate you. Got it? Loud and clear. And second, reason for his brilliance is that he's not calling his followers to go anywhere that he's not first gone himself.

He is the pioneer of the world-forsaken, heaven-traveling, cross-taking life. And those two reasons come together to show us that he is totally trustworthy today.

He is worthy of everything that you have in your life because he's this kind of king. And so hear Jesus say that if joy and persecution are the dominant flavors of your life today as a disciple, then that is normal Christianity.

And of course, this only makes sense when we understand what it is to be a Christian. What takes this passage and makes it more than you need to up your game and be brave and makes it into something that is life-alteringly good is if we understand what Jesus has done for us.

And it's always the wonderful truth in the Christian life that it always comes back to who we are as disciples of Jesus. You know, there's a famous hymn that the church have sung down through the ages called I Have Decided to Follow Jesus.

[5 : 34] But I was hearing this week about a church in the States who have changed the lyrics to this. I never wanted to follow Jesus.

I never wanted to follow Jesus. I never wanted to follow Jesus. But he rescued me.

He rescued me. So no turning back. No turning back. And as they sing it, they're reminding themselves that yes, there is no glory like knowing Jesus in this world.

It is worth forsaking everything for. And we're declaring as we sing this song that we are choosing to follow him with everything that we've got in this life. But that is not the prerequisite for, but the response to the fact that he chose, loved and pursued enemies of God like us.

And he did it not second. He did it first. Or if I could put it like this, Jesus was interested in us way before we were interested in him.

[6 : 53] You read Galatians 1. Paul talks about how he was set aside before he was born. Because I'll tell you what, before I became a Christian, I used to think just like the world does, that religion, Christianity is a big game of hide and seek, except that I'm the seeker and God's the hider.

And yet you step into the Jesus story. You hear him talk. You come to realize that it's completely the opposite way around. That we were lost. We had no interest in him.

And yet he came to find us. Jesus is the great seeker. He is the great saver. He is the great restorer.

He is the great renewer of human hearts. And I think this is why it is so important that we let Jesus' words, not our logic of how we think it works, shape the way that we understand ourselves, the world and these heavenly realities that he's speaking about here.

Now, I'm a simple guy. Maybe you can imagine it like the claw in Toy Story. As you take in what Jesus says to his original disciples there at verse 19.

[8 : 11] It's on the screen. Follow along if you've got the Bible there. He says that I chose you out of the world. In other words, Jesus reached down into their pit.

He did more than that. He joined them in their pit. And he rescued them from the sin and the resulting eternal punishment that was theirs and ours before our holy creator.

And he did it through his blood shed on the cross. And he lifted them. He scooped them up. And he lifted them out of the world. And he took them and he placed them, not to run free, my pretties, but he took them and he placed them in him.

And that means the most defining feature of the Christian's life is that it is lived in Christ. To be a Christian is to be a completely new and a completely different kind of person.

And because of Jesus, friends, you and I are now swimming in a completely new and different direction to the one which we were previously swimming in and the world currently swims in.

[9 : 20] We have got different values. We live our lives to different priorities. We've got different beliefs. Which is why, isn't it, that as a parent, that though we love the school, we want to be a blessing to our school.

We love the people there. That when they send around what they're planning and teaching our kids about sex and sexuality, I see that differently. Hear Jesus say that when you feel different to the world, it is only because he has taken you out of the world.

You know, our calling as disciples is not to be sweet. It is most definitely not to be sour. The calling that Jesus makes on our lives is to be salty.

And remember the context here. This is hours before Jesus' death. This is where we are in the farewell discourse of this gospel.

The final say, the final push that Jesus makes. And Jesus amazingly thinks that the best use of his time in his final hours is not to use it to tick off the bucket list.

[10 : 33] It is to use it to prepare his disciples for what life will be like for them in the gap between his going and his returning.

It's where they will soon find themselves. And of course, it's where we find ourselves today. Last week, we thought about this. And really, this is the most wonderful description of the Christian life.

We saw him call his disciples to that deeply rooted life. And if you weren't here, I thought Ian did a fantastic job at just bringing out the comfort, the challenge, and the sweetness of knowing Jesus.

Particularly a line that challenged me. I think I quote you right on this, Ian. You talked about the job of our, our job is not just to be impressive looking branches. It is to produce Jesus like fruit in our lives, both individually and corporately.

Jesus is called to allow his words to nourish us, to work their way through our system. Life's where the spirit living in us is going to take those words and work them through us and produce in us delicious and joyous Jesus-shaped fruit in our lives.

[11 : 52] And just in case you thought that the world will love you for that, know that the darkness is never a fan of the light.

Maybe you can think of it like this. I remember when I was young, my mum used to wake me up, my brothers up, every single day for school. And you'd have that moment when you were, you were still semi-asleep and you would hear her footsteps coming up the stairs and getting louder and louder and louder.

She approached your door and then bam, the door would open and she would go full light switch. Full light switch. My instinctive reaction in that moment was never thank you, mum.

Because I was just sitting here thinking that I could really do with some bright light in my life right about now to wake me up. The three words in my mind every single morning were, turn it off.

And that's exactly what Jesus is saying here. That as the Spirit increasingly, just to stick with the metaphor, turns up the light dimmer switch in the lives of his disciples, the darkness in turn will increasingly raise its voice to say, turn it off.

[13 : 11] The world provides no cheerleaders on the path of godliness. It will hate you because you are not from here, says Jesus.

Now why does he talk like this? I take it as more than just being forewarned, as being forearmed. This is, see when you experience it.

And I take it, we'll come back to this in a little bit, that some of us are right now. Maybe you are in a really scary place. You're feeling the heat. You know exactly what he's talking about. Others of us, it will come.

He is saying, when it happens, don't let it alarm you. This is Jesus getting out in front of his disciples and saying, I'm telling you what life is going to be like.

And real quick, can I just pull out three things that I hope strengthen us today from what Jesus says here? Do you notice the Father, the Son, and the Spirit all in this section? Of course, it's the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.

[14 : 14] It's just two words, I take it, that have been mashed together of the threeness, the tri, and the unity. Trinity. It's the Father, Son, and the Spirit who are all involved here in the work of the disciple.

Here's three quick things for you. Jesus takes responsibility for us. Jesus is the one who's standing behind all of this. Jesus is the one saying to his disciples, verse 18, when the world opposes you, know that it opposed me first.

He is the one saying, verse 21, that when they do these things to you, they will do them on account of my name. So when the world opposes you, however sharp or little that might be, know that what is really going on here is that the world is opposing me.

Jesus is the one who's standing behind this all. And he is the one who's standing above it all. You know, one of the first Christian martyrs that you get chronologically just after this, I guess, in the book of Acts is a man called Stephen whose only crime is that he talks about Jesus and the people's need of him and they don't want to hear it and they kill him for it.

But what you get in that scene in Acts is not just the play out on earth. What you get there is the view from heaven. Jesus is at the right hand of God and he's not sitting.

[15 : 44] He's standing. He's standing. He's standing as if to say the suffering of my people, it doesn't just get my attention. The suffering of my people draws out my heart.

Jesus is, this is more than just he sees what's going on. No, he stands with his people in this moment. Jesus takes responsibility here for the life of his disciples.

He's got us. He's got us. And secondly, do you see how the Father has visibility of us? At verse 24, Jesus isn't saying that before he entered the world, people were without fault.

He's saying that the signs, which I take it is just code for his whole life in ministry, it brings out of people, it draws to the surface the rejection of God that was already there.

And he wants the disciples to know that as people rejected him, what they were in fact doing was rejecting the Father who sent him. And so there's a little domino effect that's playing out here, that as the people reject us, they are in turn rejecting the Son, and they are in turn rejecting the Father who sent him.

[17 : 04] What does Jesus want us to know about the Father? Do you see how at verse 25 there, he quotes Jesus likely from the Psalms, the book of the Bible we get in the Old Testament, likely from Psalm 35, a little bit of it on the screen.

Go home and read it in your own time. This Psalm of David, as he pours out his soul before the Lord, he's feeling unjustly treated as he tries to walk in godliness.

People are trying to trip him up at every opportunity. People are bringing unfounded accusations against him. And he says, Lord, listen, they repay me evil for my good.

One of the dominant themes you get in that Psalm is, Lord, you have seen it all. Lord, you are the all-knowing one, and also you are the all-seeing one.

And Lord, I keep going because I know that none of what's playing out here has escaped your notice. And I keep going because, Lord, one day I know that you will vindicate me.

[18 : 11] If you watch that ITV drama, Mr. Bates in the post office, was that not the big thing that was coming up? It was not a scene in that where he says it's not just about the compensation, it's about the truth winning.

It's about being vindicated, being right. That's something we all long for, isn't it? For the truth to prevail. And this is saying that God sees it all. All the suffering of his people, every nasty words, every mocking laugh, every evil intention, every blow to the chest, the Father has visibility of it all.

And thirdly, the Spirit brings credibility. You see, I think that's the helper that Jesus is talking about there at verse 26. The Spirit whose job it is to convince people about the truth of and their need of Jesus as their Savior.

Now, I take it that there's an internal angle here to the Spirit's work because in Psalm 35, again, right up top, you get this, David praying to God and he says, would you say to my soul that you are my salvation?

In other words, would you massage this truth deep down into my life because right now I'm struggling to believe that it's true. And I take it that the Spirit for the believer brings that sense of assurance to our hearts as we suffer for Jesus in the words of Romans 8.

[19 : 49] And of course, there, the context in Romans 8 is all about the groaning that we feel for God to come and make this right. The Spirit will help us cry, Abba, Father.

Father, help me know. Help me know this truth. Help me to keep going. And I take it there's an external angle in the Spirit's work as well.

The primary mission of the Spirit and His people is to show the world that Jesus is more glorious than anything or anyone else that the world could possibly offer.

As you live your life faithfully for Jesus, it may look like foolishness to you. It may look like we are wasting our time.

But can I encourage us to see, because of what Jesus says here, not to think for a second that the Spirit of God isn't at work in ways that are so far above our ability to comprehend.

[20 : 54] Because speaking about and witnessing for Jesus, it really will be like the proverbial Marmite taste. For some, as they watch you and taste your life, it will be the smell and the taste of death.

And they will be repelled by it. However, others will taste the same thing. And to them, it will be the smell and taste of life.

And they will be drawn to it. And that is how the Spirit of God is at work in our everyday faithfulness.

Now just on that note, our time is gone. Just as we close, let me tell you about a friend of mine at school called Stephen. Stephen. Because this is exactly how it worked out for me.

Stephen was a Christian in our year at school. Everyone knew that Stephen was a Christian. But there was one day in particular that all of us found out that he was actually serious about this whole God stuff.

[22 : 01] It was a few days before our school rugby team played in the Scottish schools finals due to be played on the pitches at Murrayfield. Now you're a sporty 14-year-old boy.

That stuff is the stuff of dreams. And in the days before, the coach gathers us together as a squad and he tells us the tournament is going to be on a Sunday.

And he says, boys, is there any reason before I name the squad that anyone thinks they're not going to be able to play? And Stephen's hand goes up and he says in front of the whole room, he says, sir, I won't make it because I'll be at church.

And the rest of us look at each other utterly baffled because in our minds he has got the choice between Murrayfield and the monastery and he's got it for one Sunday and he's picked the monastery.

And all of us were thinking, why on earth would you choose to do that? Now we got obliterated in the first round so perhaps Stephen had most definitely got the last laugh.

[23 : 13] But there I was growing up going to church but let me tell you very, very happy to be non-committal about it as one who loved the fence. I owned the fence growing up going to church, going to school and I'm watching Stephen here unashamedly nail his colours to the mast and I hear the nicknames that people give him outside the group and I hear the jokes that people make about him behind his back and he was fully aware of what's going on but while for everyone else in the room it just confirmed the ridiculous nature of the Christian faith for me for some reason which I never understood at the time but this passage tells me Stephen's life drew me to Christianity Christianity and I saw in him someone who fully embraced the paradox that's right at the heart of the Christian life.

He had joy and he was willing to embrace persecution and in the world's eyes you have joy when things are going well and when things are going badly you don't have joy and yet this tells us doesn't it and I saw in him that those two things run right together and I remember thinking to myself in that moment whatever he's got whatever the secret sauce is in his life I want it and I need it and so here's two words just to that I'll leave you with as we respond to this passage today two places where I think this is going to land for us here's the first word is courage do some of us need to embrace the call to stand up and be different for Jesus and associate with him publicly when the question comes at you tomorrow what did you do with your weekend what are you going to say for some of us this will be about courage let me just say if you've never done this publicly before we have a baptism class that Kate will mention later on tomorrow night on

Zoom from 7.15 till just before 8 o'clock before the prayer meeting if you want to publicly associate yourself with Jesus that's what baptism is you are saying I'm following him come to that class and find out about what baptism is but maybe let me just say the start of the year is always the best time to nail your colors to the mast some of us this will come as a challenge for courage and others I take it that we are here and it's not courage we need comfort you know the pain of what Jesus is talking about here and you feel it in your life acutely and it may be playing out in all sorts of different places in your university in your family in your workplace with your neighbors however this is playing out for you just now I want you to know that everything that we've done here in this passage is true and I want you to we will be praying tonight at the prayer meeting we will be praying tomorrow night on zoom as well we will try to establish this prayer weekend every month that we do we want everybody to join in the prayer life of the church if this is you here's what

I want you to do and I don't know if the slide but I want you just to email questions at Brunsfield that's our general email address where all the general inquiries go just tell us your name and tell us how we can be praying for you what the arena is right now where you're feeling the punch and we will make sure that all of us pray for those things together because this is about corporately what we do we stand as a body individuals yes but as a body we uphold each other when the going gets tough and that's what we're called to do we will make sure that we pray for you again speak to somebody that you've come with grab one of us you've seen up here we would love just to pray for you right now as well and I'm going to do that in a minute but let me just leave you with this finished a great book just now called future proof how Jesus has future proofed the church great read if you want it this is what the author Australian Stephen McAlpine says he says yes western culture may never have been more hostile but it has never been more open either and both hostility and openness are only set to increase our challenge and our opportunity lies in the paradox let me pray

Lord Jesus we just thank you for who you are today we thank you for the theological truth and heart of this passage that we feel this in our lives because you are the one who's chosen us out of the world we thank you for grace we praise you for your mercy and Lord I pray particularly for those two words we thought about at the end Lord however this is playing out in our lives right now I trust that your spirit will be at work bringing that sense of courage help us to be bold for you Lord Jesus help us Lord as we think about the arenas that we're currently in just now and how we can witness for you there Lord I also pray for those who need comfort Lord who really are feeling the sharp end of standing for you and the cost of doing so Lord would you draw alongside as one who knows as one who cares as one who sees and as one who has got us in the palm of your hands

[29 : 03] Father help us to be those who are not just living for today but are those who are incentivized because of the gospel to live for tomorrow and for your return so Father be with us now as we close our time together we pray in Jesus precious name we ask Amen
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