

Session 5

April 3, 2022

A LIFE OF PERSECUTION

John 15:18-25; 16:1-4a

My parents never liked my brothers or me to use the word *hate*. Of course, as kids, we usually applied the word to each other! They said we could never “hate” anyone, and especially not our own family members (even if at times we felt they deserved it!).

Hate is indeed a strong word. Jesus Himself said that we are not to hate even our enemies, but rather are to love them (Matt. 5:43-44). But just because believers are required to love everybody doesn't mean that everybody is going to love us back. In fact, Jesus taught His disciples in this passage that the world hated Him and all He stood for and would in turn hate them. While we face little persecution in our country, that's not the case for much of the world. The world still hates Jesus Christ and all He stands for. In our focal passage, Jesus gives some reasons why.

They hate out of ignorance (15:18-21). The overall theme of these passages is preparation. Jesus is warning His disciples about what will take place. They are certainly aware of the religious establishment's animosity against the Lord. He has told them of His coming death (see Matt. 16:21-23, et al.), and they themselves have mentioned it (John 11:16). But it was unlikely that they understood the firestorm that would take place in their next 24 hours, much less in the weeks and months that would follow. The key reason for their hatred Jesus gave in this passage is found in verse 21: “But they will do all these things to you on account of My name, *because they don't know the One who sent Me.*” People are naturally afraid of those things they don't understand. It's much easier to see the unknown as a threat than as an opportunity. The apostle Paul said the Jews had “a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge” (Rom. 10:2), and that was certainly the case here. Simply put, the Jews hated Jesus because they did not connect Him to the God they thought they knew. And the rest of the world would follow suit. They hated Him and they would hate His followers out of ignorance. For reflection: *How does the zeal for God apart from knowledge that Paul mentioned show up in today's culture? Are there examples even in the church?*

They hate out of knowledge (15:22-25). Pastor Adrian Rogers used to say that an atheist can't find God for the same reason a thief can't find a cop! Because to acknowledge God means one must then be accountable to Him. The Jews of Jesus' day were certainly not atheists. But they acted as such when it came to Jesus. The point Jesus makes in these verses is clear: both His message and His miracles demonstrated that He was the divine Son of God. Without those, they might have had good reason to ignore Him at best or attack Him at worst. But because of His testimony, they were now accountable to Him. Unable to come to grips with accepting Him, they opted rather to destroy Him. And that is the sin Jesus pointed out in verses 22 and 24. Moreover, their rejection of Christ the Son signaled their rejection of God the Father (v. 23). For reflection: *Jesus makes the point that to reject the Son is to reject the Father. Why is that?*

They hate out of pride (16:1-4). No one represented the Jewish leaders of Jesus' day better than Saul of Tarsus. His pedigree recorded in Philippians 3 includes the phrase, “concerning

zeal, persecuting the church” (Phil. 3:6), and in Galatians 1:13-14 he made the sad boast, “...I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.” That’s exactly the behavior Jesus predicted in John 16, declaring that anyone persecuting the church would do so *as a favor to God* (v. 2). Unfortunately, that arrogant motivation would be terribly misguided. For those who refused to recognize the deity of Christ have known neither Him, nor the Father (v. 3). For reflection: *Are there ways that believers today sometimes try to “protect” God? What does that say about their pride?*