

## EXPOSITION OF JOHN

Message #62

John 16:1-4

Years ago, when I was a heathen in radio, I had a positive relationship with many religious places. Some of these religious places actually invited me to some of their parties. However, ever since coming to faith in Jesus Christ, the invitations stopped. In fact, I received a letter a couple years ago from a very religious person who didn't like the fact that I taught the straight Word of God, which contradicted their religious opinions.

When you purpose to obey the Word of God, follow the Will of God and communicate the Word of God, there will be times when you won't be real popular in life. In fact, Paul said, "all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (II Timothy 3:12). Just a desire brings trouble. When we believe on Jesus Christ, we lose all our sin and our guilt and shame. But there is something else we also lose; we lose the favor of the vast majority of the religious world that has not believed on Jesus Christ.

That is exactly why Jesus said, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me, rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:10-12).

What was about to happen to Jesus Christ and what was about to happen to the disciples of Jesus Christ was not pretty. One actual reason why Christ taught them these things was because He did not want them to stumble or to be tripped up in their faith.

**JESUS TEACHES HIS DISCIPLES THAT THEY WILL BE MISTREATED BY VERY RELIGIOUS PEOPLE SO THAT THEY WOULD NOT STUMBLE IN THEIR FAITH WHEN IT HAPPENS.**

By virtue of the fact that Jesus Christ says these things to His closest disciples who have been with Him for years, we learn a very important lesson - **it is possible for very advanced followers of Jesus Christ to stumble**. Don't think it could not happen to us because we have known the Lord for many years. Just ask Peter who denied the Lord three times or the others who fled. There were moments when they fell, but God's grace put them back on track. Obviously the thing that can prevent us from stumbling is the Word of God. An accurate understanding of God's Word is the key preventative. John Calvin said if a disciple meditates deeply on true doctrine, he will be "fully prepared for resistance" (*John*, Vol. 18, p. 132).

That word "stumble" (σκανδαλιζω) is one that refers to a snare or bait trap for the purpose of causing something to stumble (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, pp. 407-408). The aorist tense would indicate this is something that can really stop your spiritual progress in a point blank way. This potentially can level a mature disciple - be mistreated by high-ranking religious people who are supposed to be right with God. This can paralyze you. This can send you down the wrong path.

There are a couple of dangerous threats that can really trip you up in your faith if you are not thinking in a way that is theologically accurate: 1) You look at people in the world who are triumphantly prospering when you are right with God and aren't; 2) You experience terrible negative things from religious people, some of whom do not even know Jesus Christ. Jesus wanted His disciples forewarned about this.

I like what James Montgomery Boice said, "to be forewarned is to be forearmed" (*The Gospel of John*, Vol. 4, p. 1202). Christ's disciples were not going to win popularity contests in the world; specifically in the religious world. Truth is those really right with God never have and never will.

Now Jesus Christ very carefully describes what will happen to these disciples and he informs them of three negative reactions:

**NEGATIVE REACTION #1 – Religious people will make you synagogue outcasts. 16:2a**

The moment you read that noun "synagogue" you immediately know the source of all of this persecution was religious leadership. Jesus is telling His disciples that the people who will give them the greatest trouble would be the Pharisees, the scribes, the chief priests and the rulers of the synagogue. When Paul was engaged in tracking down and killing Christians prior to coming to faith in Jesus Christ, he said he was commissioned by the chief priests to do it (Acts 26:9-12).

What you would have logically thought Jesus would have said would be, the heathen Roman world will make life tough for you. You naturally expect the lost unsaved world to make life rough for you, but you don't expect the religious leadership to do it. Don't be fooled or duped, sometimes those religious people who claim they are the best are in all reality the worst. The religious world that is not right with God hates God, hates Jesus Christ, hates the Word of God and hates one in a right relationship with God. They can make life miserable for the faithful believer. But I love something John Calvin said, "They may be able to banish you from the synagogue, but they cannot banish you from the kingdom of God" (Calvin, Vol. 18, p. 133). They may stop you from ministering in their church, but they cannot stop your relationship with God.

I can tell you this, many ministers have been hurt far worse by those power-crazed dominant leaders in the church, some of whom you could question whether they are truly saved, far more than by those in the lost, unsaved world. I never had any unsaved employer shake his fist in my face and tell me we will see to it you don't get a paycheck. But I saw it in the church with a power-crazed leader whose son was a child molester.

When the text says "they will make you outcasts from the synagogue, what this means is that the religious leaders would actually excommunicate those who were in a right relationship with God through Jesus Christ and throw them out. In fact, they had already done this very thing to a blind man Christ healed (9:34).

Now this threat of being excommunicated from the synagogue, was much more devastating than it is today even in a church excommunication. In a church excommunication, there is typically the termination of fellowship and membership. Usually the one under discipline will just run to another church and not even much care what has happened.

We had a person under discipline start going to another church, and no one seemed to care. In fact, people in today's society can get along relatively well in society without being a member of any church. But this was not true in Israel especially when it came to the synagogue.

Being part of a synagogue not only was critical to access to Scriptures and spiritual life in Israel, but it had tremendous social ramifications. If you were cast out of a synagogue, it would mean you would be cut off from economic stability; you could lose your friends and your family. You would lose the potential land inheritance which would include your own proper burial sight.

**There is something very dispensational in this statement that you do not want to miss. Since the disciples would be excommunicated out of the synagogue, where would they worship? The answer is the church !**

God would begin a new epoch time called the Church Age. What these religious leaders of the synagogue didn't realize is that by putting the disciples out of their places of worship, they were actually promoting God's true, new place of worship, the church. Actually there is nothing better than to be kicked out of a religious place that does not really have the presence of God. Why would we even want to hang around a religious place that doesn't even have the presence or power of God in it?

When you love the Word of God, there will be those religious, powerful, leaders who will not like you and will even persecute you. They may want you out of the church, out of the way. Don't let it faze you or cause you to stumble in your faith.

**NEGATIVE REACTION #2 – Religious people will kill you thinking they are servicing .  
God. **16:2b****

Satan has always twisted things just the opposite of God's Word and truth. He turns things around so that right is wrong and wrong is right. Jesus is telling His disciples that there is coming a time when not only will people do wrong and think it is right, but they will do wrong and think it is worship.

One of the more vivid demonstrations of this was in the killing of Stephen (Acts 7:54-60). Saul, who later would become Paul, was ravaging the church (Acts 8:3) thinking he was serving God (Acts 22:3-4).

Later, Paul himself would experience the same thing. He said that he was viewed to be the "scum of the world, the dregs of all things" (I Corinthians 4:13).

Killing believers as martyrs is not new to China or Pakistan or Afghanistan or Iraq. It is as old as the Bible.

According to Thomas Whitelaw, if we actually track what happened to the disciples, literally this is what happened; most of the disciples were killed. Matthew suffered martyrdom by sword in Ethiopia. Mark died at Alexandria after being dragged through the streets of the city. Luke was hanged on an olive tree in Greece. Peter was crucified at Rome with his head downward. James was beaten and beheaded. James the less was thrown down from a pinnacle of the temple. Bartholomew was flayed alive. Andrew was bound to a cross and kept preaching until he died. Thomas was run through the body in India. Jude was shot to death with arrows. Matthias was first stoned and then beheaded. Barnabas was stoned to death by Jews. Paul was beheaded in Rome by Nero (Thomas Whitelaw, *Commentary On John*, p. 343).

**NEGATIVE REACTION #3** – Religious people will do these things because they do not know Jesus Christ and they do not know God the Father.  
**16:3**

There was no group on the face of this earth who claimed to have such a wonderful relationship with God as the religious Jews.

Make no mistake about this - **religious wickedness that attacks those right with God is due to the fact that they do not know God.** They do not know God the Father and they do not know God the Son. To know God the Father you must know and have a relationship with Jesus Christ the Son. They strut around as if they are the big leaders for God and they do not even know God.

**Now in verse 4**, Jesus says I am telling you these things now for two reasons:

**(Reason #1)** - Jesus Christ told them these things now so that they may remember them.  
**16:4a**

The point of them remembering this is so they wouldn't get tripped up in their faith when these bad things started happening to them.

**(Reason #2)** - Jesus Christ did not tell them these things at the beginning because He was with them. **16:4b**

There are some things God does not want us to see or get until the time is right. As we have tracked Christ's ministry with these disciples, we have seen that their faith has been slow in developing. There had been moments when He dropped some hints of this kind of thing (Luke 6:22), but now He tells them specifically what is going to happen. Just think had He told them of this when He first called them to be His disciples. He knew the time was now right and He knew now that they could take it and so He revealed it to them.

Jesus had never really fully developed the hardships that would be theirs until now. So long as Christ was with them the target of hatred was Him. But since He was about to leave, the target of hatred would be them.

The thing that will keep you sane and steady is the Word of God. Knowledge of God's Word is the key to your stability.