



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

John 15:18 – 16:4

“The Believer in the World”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We're turning again in our study of the upper room discourse to John chapter 15, and the subject for tonight is, “The Believer in the World.” John chapter 15, verse 18 through chapter 16 verse 4. In the opening part of John chapter 15 the Lord Jesus has stressed the fact that those who have believed in him are in union with him. And he has exhorted them to abide in him. He has laid great stress upon the fact that by abiding in him certain effects might be expected in the Christian life. The outflow of the relationship to him is an outflow of fruit bearing. And this new relationship of union with him is to result in answered prayer. It's to result in much fruit and other blessings associated with that. It is also our Lord's point in the verses that follow that the relationship to Jesus Christ means a new kind of relationship to the world. So the outflow of fruit bearing is one aspect of union with Christ, but union with Christ also means a new relationship to the world about us. And that relationship is something entirely different.

He said in verse 1, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser,” and then speaks about branches in him bearing fruit. But now in verse 18 he says, “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.” So union with Christ results in two rather diametrically opposed things, first, fruit, but then hate, fruit so far as the outflow of that life among others is concerned, but hate is provoked by the relationship

that we bear to him. It's not without significance that the disciples are to be known by their love and the world by its hate. So this is a rather significant section and something that we as Christians need to bear in mind constantly.

Two purposes seem to be in the Lord's mind as he tells them of this hostility of the world. The first thing is that he wants to warn them of the things that will happen, and then he wants to support them by the fact that when these things do come to pass, they will realize that the Lord Jesus said that this would happen and because he said that it would happen it would be an encouragement to them, reminding them that it was not an accident, not something unanticipated by him. So let's turn now to John chapter 15 and verse 18, and let me read verses 18 through 25.

“If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me. If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin. He that hateth me hateth my Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father.”

This truth that our Lord is expounding here, that is that the believer is related to the Lord Jesus Christ and can expect the same kind of response from the world that the Lord Jesus received, is not simply a truth found in the Gospel of John. In the Gospel of Matthew at an earlier time, the Lord Jesus said much the same thing. In the 25th verse of the 10th chapter of Matthew we read, “It is enough for the disciple that he be as his

teacher, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?” And so he warned them if these in the world should call him Beelzebub they can expect to be called similarly. So in these verses that we’ve just read, the antagonism of the foe is brought to the attention of the eleven who are in the upper room with the Lord Jesus.

Now he says that there are several reasons why they can expect the world to be antagonistic to them. First of all, it is their election. “If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world,” there it is. The choice that the Lord Jesus has made of them is the source of antagonism so far as the world is concerned. The world often complains loudly of what has been called the *odium theologicum*, that is, the theological hate, the bitterness with which the church speaks with reference to the world. But the church is assailed by an *odium saecularis*, that is, a secular kind of hatred that is far worse than anything that the church has for the world. The antagonism of the world for believers were not caused by the sins of the believers is really a continuation of the quarrel that the world had with the Lord Jesus Christ. So the Lord reminds them then right in the beginning that they can expect to find that the world is going to be quite unhappy about having them in their midst. And basic and fundamental is the fact that they have been chosen out of the world.

I think it’s fair to say that the world does not like the doctrine of election. And they do not like the idea that it should possible be true that God has really and truly selected some people from the world for special blessing. I think really the source of anti-Semitism is the unconscious knowledge, and sometimes the conscious knowledge, of the fact that God has put his hand upon Israel. And even Christians can fall into that. The Bible makes very plain that God did put his hand especially upon Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and the nation Israel, and he has special purposes for them. And right at the

heart of anti-Semitism is the rejection of the idea that God should have some favorites, some upon whom he has laid his hand in distinguishing grace.

Now the same principle pertains with reference to the eleven the Lord Jesus says. They will hate you because I have chosen you out of the world, and because of that relationship they'll not feel good about it. Plato even, long before the coming of the Lord Jesus, once said that if a truly righteous man ever appeared on earth he would be scourged, imprisoned and hanged. He sensed, even in his unbelief, that the world is very opposed to that which is contrary to its own mode of life. And how much more is that true of the believers?

In the 20th verse he adds another reason. It's not only the election that they have enjoyed. But he says, “Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.” So they share his life, and because they share his life, because of their relationship to him, that involves sharing his fate.

I believe that occasionally we as believers do not like to accept this position in the world. We rather think that it would be especially good for us if we could get along well with the world. We think that surely the way to reach the world is to get along good with them. And so we do everything that we possibly can to be in the good graces of the world. Now, of course, let me say, the world should not have any just reason for being critical of the church of Jesus Christ. We're not talking about just reasons. If Christians don't pay their bills, for example, the world is justly angry at them. Course, they don't pay theirs either, but they don't like a Christian who claims to be a Christian not to pay his. If a Christian is a very disagreeable kind of character in his office, the world justly complains about them, particularly if they make great professions of Christianity. And this especially holds true of those who make professions of not only their Christianity, but of their position in the Christian church.

I have some good friends who have a Baptist deacon over them. And this Baptist deacon contrary to most Baptist deacons I'm sure evidently is a rather disagreeable character. And I have constantly heard from them about this Baptist deacon and the kind of existence that he manages to live in that office. Well if this is true, and there is a great deal of evidence that seems to suggest it is true, they are justly complaining about this man. We're not talking about that. What we're talking about is that a Christian who is a genuine Christian and who is living the kind of life that is a reflection of his relationship to the Lord Jesus may expect to be persecuted for his faith.

One of the commentators on the Gospel of John makes a comment concerning a believer's prayer life. And he says it probably would be good if in the midst of our professions of loyalty to Jesus Christ and in the midst of our times of prayer an angel should suddenly appear to some of us as we are praying about the difficulties that we have, some of them related to this very thing, and if the angel should say to us, “Don't waste any time worrying about these things. Get up off of your feet and get on with the business of being persecuted for the sake of Jesus Christ.” Well there is something in that too. So because of the relationship that we bear to him we should expect to have difficulties.

Now I hope that this individual is not in the audience, or if they're in the audience, I hope they won't be upset. But some time ago I received a telephone call real early in the morning. I don't mind calls in the morning incidentally. But this one was a call of a lady who was weeping over the phone and I thought surely that there was a death in the family because that usually is the source of that kind of call. But in this case, it was not. The individual was weeping over the fact that members of the family had responded very rudely to her and to her Christian faith. And I guess we all have had a similar experience. We all have been deeply disturbed over the fact that we came to know Jesus Christ and the members of our family didn't particularly respond the way that we thought that they might respond, the way we wanted them to respond. But as

believers we have, from the word of God, the expectation that we shall be persecuted for the sake of Jesus Christ. She was very upset because the members of her family, and they were in a very stayed denominational church, had called her a Jesus freak. Well now strictly speaking that was a compliment. That really was a compliment. They didn't mean it as a compliment, but they had gotten the message that she really was a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ and was actually a little fanatical, at least that's the way they understood it. They obviously thought she was far too interested in the things of Jesus Christ, and that's why they gave her that name. And she was extremely upset over it. But we should expect because of our identification with the Lord Jesus to be persecuted for his name sake. Let's just be sure that it's not a just kind of persecution because of our own faults and failures.

A third reason that is given for this antagonism of the world is written in verse 21, “But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me.” In other words, ignorance of the Father is at the heart of the opposition of the world. Now the Lord goes on to speak about the results. Oh incidentally I should say this in connection with the ignorance of the Father. This ignorance of the Father is a proof of lack of love. It might seem at first that this doesn't fit in too well with the preceding context, but when he says, “Because they know not the him that sent me,” he indicates by this that ignorance of the Father is a proof of lack of love for him. If they really loved him, they would find out about him. And since they are indifferent to him and do not know him, then one can expect that they will be antagonistic to the things of the Lord. So let's don't be surprised then if as disciples of the Lord Jesus the world be very unhappy with us.

Many of you in this audience have suffered a great deal for that reason. I can look out over and know that some of you have lost members of your family, that is, the relationships that you had because of your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and probably some of you have lost a job. And many other things may have happened to you because

of your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Don't be surprised by that. After all, the world and the believer represent incompatible interests. We differ with the world about God. We differ with the world about ourselves. We differ with the world about life. We differ with the world about our duties. We differ with the world about our views concerning the future. We differ with the world about our views concerning death. In almost all of the spheres of human existence the beliefs of the believers in our Lord Jesus Christ are opposed by the beliefs of the world. And so if we are really standing for our Lord Jesus Christ we shall expect to be persecuted for him.

In the Book of Acts in the 5th chapter there's a rather interesting little expression, I think, which believers should take to heart when they undergo this kind of persecution that the Lord is speaking about. It's in Acts chapter 5, and we read in verse 40, the apostles have been having difficulty because of their testimony. And we read,

“To him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name.”

Now the results of this antagonism are described in verse 22 and following. “If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin.” That's a rather strange statement isn't it? I confess that I'm often puzzled over this. For a long time I used to teach a course at Dallas Seminary called “The Upper Room Discourse,” and in this discourse we studied the Greek text of these chapters, chapters 13 through 17 in very close detail over an entire semester. And I confess that this verse used to puzzle me considerably. In fact still puzzles me a little bit. I'm not sure that my interpretation is wholly correct. “If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin.” One thing, of

course, our Lord does not mean is that the Jews would have been sinless if he had not come and spoken to them. So when he says “If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin,” he does not mean that they had been sinless because there are too many statements of our Lord that imply the exact opposite. He says, for example, in one case, speaking to men in general, he said, “If ye then being evil know how to give good gifts unto men.” The Lord Jesus believed that men were depraved. He believed that men were sinful. So we have to rule out that. He did not mean if I had not come and spoken unto them the Jews would have been sinless. But I think that what he means is that the sin of rejecting God as he really is in the revelation in our Lord Jesus Christ is what he has in mind. In other words, the sin of rejecting God as he really is would not be imputed to them. Or perhaps it was the particular sin of unbelief which he will speak about in chapter 16.

“If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin,” in the sense that I have come and I have spoken unto them and they now have a full revelation of the Father. And the sin of rejecting him as the full revelation of the Father would not have been imputed to them. And isn't it interesting too that the reverse is also true of us. If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin.” Now he has come, and he has spoken to us, and by the grace of God we have responded, and we do not have sin by virtue of what our Lord has accomplished for us. So the coming of the Lord Jesus was a full revelation of God and a full revelation of the sin of Israel. And now there is no cloak for their rejection for the full revelation of God in the person of Christ has taken place.

There is a story told of an African chiefess who happened to visit a mission station. The missionary had a little mirror hung up on a tree outside his cabin and the chiefess happened to look into the mirror, and since she had never seen a mirror before she saw herself reflected there and all her own grotesque countenance because of the kind of paint that she was wearing. And she jumped back in horror and said, “What's that

horrible looking person inside that tree?” “Oh,” they said, “it’s not in the tree. The glass is reflecting your own face.” And she couldn't believe it until she held the mirror in her own hands, and then she said, “I must have that glass.” And so finally she managed to talk them into selling the glass to her, the mirror. And so she bought it, and the minute that she got it she flung it down on the ground and broke it into pieces and said, “I’ll never have that thing making faces at me again.” Well the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ was, of course, the revelation of the Father. And in the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ Israel was given a full picture of him and in seeing him, they also saw themselves. And they saw themselves as opposite to the revelation of God in Christ.

Let me read on verse 23 and 24.

“He that hateth me hateth my Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father. But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause.”

That expression, incidentally, “without a cause” is one that is used in the Epistle to the Romans, and it’s used in the famous verse, Romans chapter 3 verse 24 where the apostle says, “Being justified freely.” That’s the word, *dorean*, that is used here and translated “without a cause.” We can take this translation actually and use it in Romans chapter 3, “Being justified without a cause,” that is, without a cause in us, the whole cause being in Jesus Christ. It illuminates the fact that our justification is a free justification. They hated me without a cause.

Now, at this point the Lord turns to the antidote of the foe, the world. “But when the comforter is come,” verse 26, “Whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me.” So the vindication of the Lord is to come by the spirit. Notice that in this two verse section,

verse 26 and verse 27, reference is made first to the witness of the spirit and then to the disciples' witness. “And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.” So we have the witness of the comforter and the witness of the disciples, but they really are one witness because their witness is a witness that is the product of the Holy Spirit's witnessing through them. So in the midst of the persecution that they shall experience, in the midst of the difficulties that they shall have with the world, they have the assurance of the presence of the Holy Spirit, and he will testify of the Lord Jesus Christ through them.

Isn't that an interesting thing? And isn't it a great thing to realize that the Holy Spirit is testifying through the believers? Even in these experiences, even in the tears of my friend who called me on the telephone, even in the love that she, no doubt, manifests toward the members of her family because obviously she does love them, even in those things the Holy Spirit is giving testimony. I have a hunch that the reason that that remark was blurted out was because of conviction, and so often the things that we think of as things that shatter us are really things that are used by God to bring the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it's one of the greatest comforts that a Christian has through the word of God is the knowledge that the Holy Spirit is with us in the experiences of life. And when we are persecuted, when we are scorned and ridiculed, we have the assurance of divine enablement and divine help.

Now, I think that the Lord evidently felt that the apostles needed some instruction about what might happen to them more specifically. He said that the world shall hate them. He said the world will persecute them. Well they would probably naturally be thinking, now what will the world do to us? And so we have some of the acts that the foe will accomplish described for us in chapter 16 verse 1 through verse 4, and let me read these verses. “And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.” I'd not life for you to be stumbled by what's going to happen to you.

“They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me. But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them. And these things I said not unto you at the beginning, because I was with you.”

Now the acts are of two kinds. Some of them are mental, like putting out of the synagogue, verse 2, “They shall put you out of the synagogue,” excommunication. Now when we are thinking about this in the context of the local church, it doesn't really mean to us quite as much as it meant to the apostles because in their relationship to the synagogue there was a much fuller relationship than there is between the believers, unfortunately, and the church today. You see when a man was a member of the synagogue he was attached not only to a religious group, but as you probably know, Israel was a kind of divine community, a theocratic nation. And consequently they had the closest of relationships. They lived by the same civil laws. They had certain responsibilities, one to another. And life in the synagogue was not simply a spiritual life or a religious life, but it touched all of their social life as well. So when a person was put out of the synagogue, it was more than being excommunicated in a church.

In Believers Chapel if you should be guilty of some form of sin and if proper biblical discipline should be carried out, that is, you should be counseled by some friend who knew about it and if you do not respond then others taken as witnesses, and then if there is no response if the elders then are involved, and finally the elders, after counsel with the individual feel that there is grounds for disciplinary action, then the disciplinary action that they would take would be to publically name you and let you know that you were not welcome to partake of the Lord's Supper. As I understand discipline, it does not mean that you are not welcome to attend the meeting of the Lord's table, but you're not welcome to partake. You should be here. That's where you should be if you're under

discipline because it's at the Lord's table that you might, probably most definitely, respond to the truths of the word of God. But, if it were necessary for such a course of action to be taken, the social side of that would not be nearly so severe as it would have been to have been put out of the synagogue.

Now a lot of that is carried over into the New Testament because it is specifically stated for example, that you should not have fellowship of a kind with a person under discipline that might suggest that you do not recognize their discipline. So someone who is under biblical discipline should not be invited over to your house so that you eat with them because there should be a recognition of the fact that the person is under discipline but they should be treated as a Christian brother. So there are certain differences whether they are justifiably so or not is beside the point that the Lord is making. When he said that they would be excommunicated it was a very severe form of discipline. To be put out of the synagogue was to be excommunicated not only from religious experience but from all social experience with their family and their friends as well. So it was very severe.

Now he also mentions that there will be physical things too, and there will be murder. “In fact those who kill you will think that he is doing God's service.” Now we've seen illustrations of this in the history of the apostles. And we've seen illustrations of this in the history of the Christian church, Luther's experience with the church at Rome, missionaries' experience, even in Africa today, missionaries experience over the face of the globe. Tradition has some interesting things to say about the apostles in the light of this.

Let me read you some of the things that traditions say about the apostles. In fact, tradition says that all of the apostles, but the Apostle John, were martyred. We know of course that Stephen was stoned to death. James, the brother of John was beheaded by Herod Agrippa. Philip suffered martyrdom in Phrygia being scourged, imprisoned and crucified about 54 A.D. Matthew was slain with a halberd in Ethiopia around 60 A.D.

James the less was beaten and stoned at the age of ninety-four and finally had his brains dashed out with a fuller's club. Matthias was stoned and beheaded at Jerusalem. Andrew was crucified at Edessa on a cross with the two ends fixed transversely in the ground, hence the derivation of the term Saint Andrew's Cross. Mark was dragged to pieces in Alexandria. Peter, according to Jerome was crucified at Rome under Nero with his head down thinking himself unworthy to be crucified as his master. Jude was crucified at Edessa in 72 A.D. Bartholomew was crucified in India. Thomas was thrust through by a spear in India. And Simon Zelotes was crucified in Britain so tradition says.

Now, of course, we do not have any sure knowledge of this, but it's rather striking isn't it that all of these apostles but the Apostle John traditionally suffered a violent death. It's not surprising. Today we don't crucify followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, we ridicule them. We scorn them. We say that they are illiterate fuddy-duddies, or we call them Jesus freaks, or we say that they are fanatics and various other ways by which they are scorned and despised. Now the Lord says the reason for this is, in verse 3, “Because they have not known the Father, nor me.” That word “known” is a word that means to know by experience too. They have not known, that is, they have not really come to know in the full sense of the knowledge of salvation.

So my dear Christian friend what shall we do about this? Why is the world not angry with us? I think it would be good. Don't you? If all over Dallas there was a lot of antipathy to Believers Chapel? Oh we've got some of our friends that don't like us, but they're believers. They're upset over some things that happened here. That's alright. But why is it that the Christian church is not despised and not hated and not scorned and not ridiculed? Some people think that's good. I doubt it. I think we'd probably be much better off if the world really and truly hated us; if they really did scorn us and if everybody knew that they did, if we were publically ridiculed constantly. Well I think that we probably all know the reason why.

William Temple once said, “Who would bother to crucify the Christ of Liberal Protestantism?” Because the Christ of Liberal Protestantism was a Christ who was just a good man and who had just an ethical system to proclaim and who does not say that men are evil and need to be born again and are headed for a Christless eternity and shall find their way into the fires of Gehenna. That’s not the Christ of Liberal Protestantism. And so consequently the Christ of Liberal Protestantism is not crucified at all. It’s when Christ is preached as he is found in the Bible that men, the world, becomes angry, and then they do pick up and continue their quarrel with Jesus Christ. And perhaps the reason why we are not scorned and ridiculed and persecuted is because we are not very much like our Lord. The servants are not like their master today. We’re not very bold in our Christian testimony. Our friends really do not have a clear presentation of the gospel from us. We wait and wait and wait and wait and wait until the spirit lead us to testify. And the facts are that very often never is a word spoken. I believe in witnessing by the direction of the Holy Spirit. But I also believe that the Holy Spirit is very anxious that men hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. If we must make an error, let’s make an error on the side of evangelizing rather than keeping quiet. But I still contend we should follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit. But I really believe that if we really were following his guidance we would be making him known.

So if you want to escape hostility then drop the flag. Take the badge off that you belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. But then you’ll be like a tiger without claws. The proper way to meet the hostility of the world is to meet the hostility of the world with the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the support of the Holy Spirit. And I think it would be a great thing if all of us, in the light of this upper room discourse, and particularly this section, should, when we get home tonight, ask ourselves a few searching questions about our own testimony to the Lord Jesus. May God help believers at Believers Chapel to be known for their boldness in witnessing for our Lord Jesus Christ. It’s not so bad if a few people call you rude and think you unsettle them

and disturb them. And I really wouldn't be totally unhappy if all of you were called Jesus freaks by somebody at least. That's my prayer for myself. Let's look to the Lord in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father we are grateful to Thee for these words of instruction from the Lord Jesus which he gave the apostles. We thank Thee that we can hear them, and oh God we pray that Thou will give us the strength to heed them. We pray Lord that truly we may experience the persecution, the ridicule, the scorn that belongs to the disciples of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Deliver us from the just ridicule and just scorn because of our failures and weaknesses. But enable us, oh God, to be bold in our testimony. We pray that our love for him will be pure and vibrant. And we ask, oh God, that through the Holy Spirit we may be used to glorify his name. How sad, oh God, for us to arrive in Thy presence having lost our opportunities. Oh God deliver us from failure. Deliver us from fear and cowardice. May our love for him be obvious, moving, growing. And we pray that, if it should please Thee, the Holy Spirit may support us...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]