

Gospel of John - episode 33

Chapter 16 part 1

Welcome to our sharing on John's Gospel. We now begin Chapter 16 where we look at the fact that the church will grow in a hostile environment. I like to call this 'the fruitful vine in a hostile environment'. In other words, a plant is placed in an environment where it would seem that impossible for it to thrive. Let's begin: 16:1-4. Jesus said, "I have told you all this so that your faith may not be shaken. They (that is the powers that be) will expel you from the synagogues, and indeed, the hour is coming when anyone who kills you will think he's doing a holy duty for God. They will do these things because they have never known either the Father or myself. But I've told you all this so that when the time comes, you may remember that I told you". Jesus reveals that the sword won't be far from them. It will, in fact, be ever present.

Those who reject the Word of Jesus, who reject his Person; those who refuse to repent, won't stay neutral.

They will persecute believers even, thinking they do God a service! This is illustrated very well in the killing of Stephen in Acts 7, where Saul, who later on became Paul, was such a fanatic, that in killing Steven, he stood and took responsibility for the death. He genuinely thought he was doing God a service, getting rid of this man. He also went to the trouble of getting letters from the Sanhedrin to authorise him to persecute the rest of the Christians. He put men and women into jail, and many of those would have died. In future centuries different groups of people will be so fanatical in their rejection of Christ that they too, will do the same thing thinking that they're doing not only God, but the Earth a service by getting rid of Christians. We also know from the Synoptic Gospels that two swords will be raised against the beloved disciples, and one of them is ecclesiastical censure.

Sometimes persecution is from within the church. For example, we've had religious wars with Christians killing each other. In the case of the Apostles and Jesus, it was the Sanhedrin; it was the leaders of the religious body that killed them. But we've also had people like Joan of Arc killed in France with the agreement of the bishops. Then, later on, they canonised her. I'm sure she wasn't impressed! So, the first sword is an ecclesiastical sword; the second comes from the civil powers. We saw a graphic example of the suppression of Christianity in the Soviet Union in the 20th century. Even the Word God was absolutely banned; nobody could acknowledge God or pronounce His Name. This reality will be with the Church for all time; it will keep the church on its toes and keep it's testimony to the Gospel fresh because of the power of the cross that will bring it through every time. Jesus tells them ahead of time so that they will understand that this is no accident.

They will eventually understand that it is the martyrs who will glorify God, not the persecutors. They will also see that the martyrs have joy and peace in laying down their lives because they will do it specifically imitating Jesus. The Apostles and the beloved disciples are all bearers of the Word of God. As a bearer of the Word of God you join the long line of 'the friends of God and prophets'. That is the privileged side of it. The costly side is that you must bear the pain of the rejected Word, just like the prophets of the Old



Testament did. Look up Ezekiel 3:7, Isaiah 6:9-10, Jeremiah 1:19, et cetera. If you are the bearer of the Word of God, you have to accept the pain of the rejection of the Word and the persecution of the Word. To silence the Word, they kill the one who delivers the Word, thinking that they're destroying the message.

But no matter what happens to Christians, it is Jesus who is the Word Incarnate. Jesus is divine; he is the **GREAT I AM**; the Alpha and the Omega; Jesus is the bearer of the Divine Name (Ha Shem). If they persecute him, they will persecute us. This persecution of the individual Christian is mentioned in the Book of Revelation Chapter 12, where we are told that Satan goes to war against all who believe the Word, all who take that Word seriously, all who are the children of the Woman. But we have just seen at the end of John 15, that hatred of Jesus is also hatred of the Father. So, the amazing thing is that it also means that hatred of the Church is hatred of the Father! It is going to be a very uncomfortable journey for the Church, who must realise that she is the bride of a sacrificed lamb; that the beloved disciples are branches of the Vine, and that each one is a member of the Mystical Body of Christ. If Satan is fighting Christ and sacrificing the Lamb, and we are all part of that, there is no escape from the suffering.

We must understand that whatever was meted out to him in terms of rejection, persecution, death, and resurrection will be our experience also. It was Israel's refusal of Jesus as the Beloved Son.... her refusal to repent; it was her attachment to darkness and evil that put the Beloved Son on trial during his ministry and caused his Death in the end. It will be the same for us. There are two passages in OT that illustrates what happens to Jesus and his members. There has to be a connexion between what the Book of Wisdom, Chapter 2 says and what happens to Jesus, because it is so accurate. There has to be a connexion between Ecclesiasticus Chapter 2 and us because again the connexion is clear. I think it illuminates the text in John. I'm going to read Wisdom Chapter 2:10-, because what the author of Wisdom does - it was written about 100 years before Christ - he uncovers the mentality of the unbelievers, and those who persecute.

Wisdom 2:10 says, "As for the virtuous man who is poor (that is Jesus) let us oppress him. Let us not spare the widow, nor respect old age, white haired with many years. Let our strength be the yardstick of virtue, since weakness argues its own futility. Let us lie in wait for the virtuous man, since he annoys us and he opposes our way of life". You see, Jesus and the beloved disciples showed God's way to the world. If the world doesn't want it, then it responds with persecution. "He reproaches us for our breaches of the law, and he accuses us of playing false to our upbringing. He claims to have knowledge of God, and he calls himself a Son of the Lord. Before us, he stands a reproof to our way of thinking. The very sight of him weighs us down. His way of life is not like other men's. The paths he treads are unfamiliar. In his opinion, we are counterfeit. He holds aloof from our doings as from filth. He proclaims the final end of the virtuous as happy, and he boasts of having God for his Father. Let us see if what he says is true. Let us observe what an end he himself will have. If the virtuous man is God's son, God will take his part" – we will hear them say, 'Come down from the cross'. "God will rescue him from the clashes of his enemies. So let us test him with cruelty and torture, and thus explore this gentleness of his, and put his endurance to the proof."

John will illustrate this perfectly in the Death of Jesus, “putting his endurance to the proof and exploring his gentleness”. “Let us condemn him to a shameful Death. He will be looked after. He says so himself”. This is exactly what was presented to Jesus, a shameful death, not just death. They could have stoned Jesus and he would die in 15 minutes. No, they wanted to shame him. They wanted to bring him down in the eyes of the people. If the scriptures are able to describe that clearly - how the other side think - then we understand why they humiliate the beloved disciples of Jesus; why they try to shame them, why they try to do everything to destroy their person.

Book of Sirach, Chapter 2, says that “if you desire to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for an ordeal, because gold is tested in the fire, and chosen men are tested in the furnace of humiliation”. It continues, “cling to him, do not leave him, and at the end of your days...”, everything will be fine. It's the most wonderful passage there. It explains this mystery – how the struggle between life and death, love and hate continues throughout history in every part of the world. If the disciples understand something of the mystery, it will help them to not fail when the challenge comes. That is one of the reasons why I so love that passage in the Acts where Peter bears his back for a scourging! In Matthew 16, Peter rejected suffering. He said, No, no, no, that's not the way to do it, but he has been changed so much by the Passion and Death and Resurrection of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit, that that he actually says it was a privilege to suffer humiliation for the sake of Jesus!

So, what is horror before the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus looks completely different after the event. The great thing is that we have such a testimony from the early church of so many men, women, and children who were prepared to ‘bear their back for a scourging’ and also take imprisonment and death for Jesus. So, what's going to happen to the Church then? The world won't change. The world rejects the Church's claim to represent God, just as Israel rejected Jesus's claim to be the Son of God. The world, because of its choice of darkness over the light, Earth over heaven, sin over grace, will reject the teaching of the Church because that would point it towards grace and a life of repentance and love. The world will reject the teaching of Holy Scripture as well, and it will persecute the members of the Body of Christ in every generation.. More martyrs died for Christ in the 20th century than in the 19th centuries before it!

Since we are heading into the time of the Antichrist, I can tell you that the martyrs of the 20th century will be far surpassed by the holocaust of Christians that will take place under the Antichrist. So, this battle will continue to the very end of time. Just as Jesus was put on trial before the people of Israel during his mission, the church is on trial before the world; the world is forever judging the church and finding fault with her. At the same time, while this is happening, we are living in the age of the Holy Spirit, because once Pentecost comes, the Holy Spirit takes up residence in the church. That is why she can give witness to Jesus; that's why she can teach the truth. That is why the church can represent the Lord and be absolutely sure ‘the Holy Spirit and we agree’ (see Acts 15). It's the Holy Spirit who bears witness to Jesus through the beloved disciples. It will be his work. The Father bore witness to Jesus, and Jesus bore a witness to the Father. The Holy Spirit bears witness to Jesus in us and through us.



The Apostles bear witness through the Holy Spirit. So, it's the fact that the Holy Spirit resides in the beloved disciples as their defence lawyer that they will be able to give this witness. Now, when we started out in chapter 14 we were told that the disciples were sad at heart at the thought of Jesus going away. In Chapter 16, after all this wonderful farewell discourse of Jesus, we find them sad at heart, but for a different reason. They realise that Jesus' Passion, Death and Resurrection will happen in a short time, and their passion and death will go on for the whole of history, not just for those particular individuals, but for the whole church. So, they realise that the future for them is very challenging, so much so, that Jesus says, "you are not even asking me where I'm going"! He has brought them at long last to the point of not being able to respond! They have heard too much, too soon. They are sitting there wondering, how can all this happen? Is this going to happen to us? How can we change like this? How can the world change as much as this? So, they don't even ask. That's what Jesus says in 16:5. "I didn't tell you this from the outset", he said, "because I was with you". Now, when Jesus was with them in the 3½ years of his ministry, he was far too busy trying to bring them into personal repentance, personal growth, and training them to become teachers, witnesses and Apostles. There was far too much going on. Why would you tell them this when they are not ready? It's not the time. If you have small children under the age of eight in a school, would you present them with the astrophysics or higher mathematics? Not at all. The children are not ready for that. They must go through a period of growth before that will be possible. So, during the 3½ years of Ministry Jesus didn't tell them this either. He tells them now at the very end when these events are about to happen and that they must face this reality.

"I did not tell you this from the outset because I was with you". While he was with them, he bore the brunt of the world's hatred and rejection. They were hiding behind him, as it were. "But now I am going back to the One who sent me. I'm going back to the Father". If they knew that he meant that within 24 hours he would be gone, I think they would be in total shock. They are in enough shock as it is. "Not one of you has asked me, Where are you going?" Now, in chapter 13 and 14, they did ask. Here, they've heard too much. "Still, I have to tell you the truth". You must know the truth. "It's for your own good that I am going, because unless I go, the Advocate will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him". Jesus has told them that the Holy Spirit is coming, and now they are struck dumb with the understanding of the suffering that's coming not only to him, but to them, and that their suffering is going to last the whole of their lives, and they will have to lay down their lives for him, as he is laying down his life for the Father.

Then he tells them, "but you will have help. You won't be on your own". He has already told them in Chapter 15, "without me, you can do nothing". I would imagine that by the time they get to Chapter 16, they know for certain they can do nothing without him, nothing whatsoever! This task is too great. But he says, 'You will have help. Because **one** of the reasons why I have to go is that your helper cannot come unless I send him to you. This is very mature spirituality that Jesus is demanding, and he's asking us to appreciate on a spiritual level the help that he's sending us. With the descent of the Son in the Incarnation, and now the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, we have the blessed Trinity making a home for themselves on the Earth among their beloved disciples.

Thank you for listening. God bless you.



INTERVAL

Welcome to our reflection on John's Gospel. We are in Chapter 16:8. Jesus said, “when the Holy Spirit comes, he will show the world how wrong it was about sin, and about who was in the right, and about judgement; about sin, proved by their refusal to believe in me; about who was in the right, proved by my going to the Father and you're seeing me no more; about judgement, proved by the prince of this world being brought already to condemnation. So here we have a very important statement as to what the testimony of the Church is going to be before the unbelieving world. Since the beloved disciples have to testify to the world how wrong it was about sin, justice and judgement with regard to Jesus, it means that the relationship between the Church and the unbelieving world is going to be a painful one. It's going to be abrasive because the cosmos doesn't like being told that it is in the wrong, but it is necessary to bear this testimony. The church is the one who must tell the unbelieving world that they have no case against Jesus. Now, it's very interesting that this is given in chapter 16, because when we come to chapter 19, we will meet Pilate, who is the representative of the cosmos, who will 3 times, which is very solemn, declare that Jesus is innocent, yet he will still scourge him, and condemn him to a shameful death. So, it is the world that is going to be shown up, not Jesus. The Holy Spirit will show the world up on 3 counts.

One is about sin, and the second one is about justice, and the third one is about judgement. Let's take sin first. I've already said several times that during his ministry, Jesus was on trial before the people of Israel, and they challenged him on every possible point. But he was able to say to them in chapter 8:46 “who could convict me of sin?” They could not find sin in Jesus. So, the chief priests who hand him over to the world power for condemnation and death, **know he is innocent**. They know he has not committed any sin. Pilate, who actually carries out the terrible killing, also knows that he's completely innocent. Now, the type of martyrdom they give to Jesus is such that it would challenge any human being to react sinfully. Yet they **found no sin in Jesus**. All they found was such peaceful heroism that even his executioner was converted in the end. So, when the Holy Spirit shows the reality of what actually happened; it is seen that it is the Jewish leaders, Pilate and the Roman soldiers who have sinned, not Jesus.

But if they don't repent and they wait until the Parousia, the final glorious coming of Jesus, to realise who Jesus was in the days of his Incarnation and who he is now, it will be too late for them because he will be **coming as a judge**. Jesus told us earlier in the Farewell Discourse that the unbelief of the world is wilful and it's deliberate. We've been told that in chapter 15, that this deliberate rebellion against God underlies all their sins; this is the foundation. We will see clearly as we go forward into the Passion of Jesus, that the world sins greatly against its Creator and Redeemer! The church has the very painful task of trying to convince every generation of the truth about Jesus because her mission is to proclaim who Jesus truly is. She does it in the hope of finding some conversion among them.

Therefore, the relationship between the Church and the world is a very painful one. It is quite abrasive. But if the Church falls into the problem of compromising with the world, which is a great temptation, then she falls into apostasy, sin, weakness and worldliness. That is disaster for her. Jesus said that **only the Holy Spirit can reveal who he is** and what was going on in his Passion and Death. So, the true meaning of the Death of Jesus is given to us before we even go there, because after all, John is writing at the end of

the first century when the church has been giving this testimony for 60 years. So, only the Holy Spirit can enlighten us as to what was actually going on. We must get past the surface and down into the deeper levels of reality. It's the Holy Spirit that brings out the sacrificial aspect of Jesus's Death and shows that it was a sacrifice for sin; that it was the true Passover, the Redemptive sacrifice. The Holy Spirit is the One who enables the church to see Jesus's perfect love and his astonishing humility, taking all that abuse from his own creatures, and to see him counteracting the hatred, the hostility, the unbelief, the negativity of all, remaining true to himself and his mission.

God is love; Jesus is Incarnate Love. What you see in Jesus throughout the Passion is his all-conquering love. It's really incredible. It is actually Jesus's Death, Resurrection, and Ascension into glory which proves his claim that he came from the Father, because he has returned to the Father. Even more than that, it is the fact that the Holy Spirit is now resident in the community of believers. The fact that the Paraclete is actually with the Church is the proof that Jesus did, in fact, go back to the Father. Now, why does this have to be underlined? Many Christians who are reading this don't know enough about the OT to know that there is a problem. In Deuteronomy 21:23 you read "cursed be any man who hangs on a tree". So, if the Jewish leaders succeed in getting Jesus crucified, then in the eyes of the world and of his own people, he is a cursed man! He could not be a friend of God. He could not be a son of God. So, it is the Holy Spirit working through the beloved disciples - who are living in communion with the Blessed Trinity - as we have been talking about in the Farewell Discourse, are the ones to pull back the curtain on the true reality that is there.

It is from the Father's Throne where Jesus has returned, that Jesus has sent the Holy Spirit to the Church. Of course, the Holy Spirit is going to demonstrate who Jesus is by the wonderful works that the disciples will do, which is seen clearly in the early chapters of the Acts. When this revelation is brought to the surface, what you find is that Jesus is the righteous one, and the world is both unrighteous and unjust. Jesus is shown to be the one who gave his life in love for us, and the world that sinned against him. We know from all that we have done in the second half of John's gospel - let alone the first half - that the unbelieving world judged Jesus worthy of death, but that cosmos is under the influence of the Prince of this world, the Prince of darkness, who is the deceiver. He is a murderer from the beginning, and a liar. Jesus said that himself. So, if they are under the influence of the Prince of darkness, then it is Satan who is deceiving them into this behaviour - as I've already explained with regard to Judas.

So, what you need to see on Calvary - and I'll try and bring the deeper levels to you as well as I can - is that it is Satan who is conquered on the cross. Darkness is destroyed there and death is overcome. When Jesus is entombed by the powers of darkness he breaks the seal of the tomb and the terror of death. When he leaves the tomb what we see is that light came out of darkness and life came out of death. So, the person who does this is the One who transformed the tomb **into a womb of God!** The Holy Spirit uses the church to bring this revelation to the world in the hope that some of them will come to Him.

The Resurrection of Jesus, therefore, is the definitive judgement of God on the unbelieving world, because we are told in the Book of Revelation Chapter 5, that the Lamb of God is at the Throne of God, and that he is given the scroll containing the destiny of the human race. We are told that he is the King of



Kings and the Lord of Lords. Chapter 12 shows a battle in Heaven with Jesus whipped up to God's Throne. The result was that Satan was thrown out of heaven. So, the victory of Jesus over Satan is given clearly in that other Book of John. The Book of Revelation fits very well after this Gospel. Since Jesus is permanently present with his disciples also, he could not have been what the unbelieving world said he was! The church has the miracle of the Eucharist daily and Jesus present indwelling the hearts of his disciples. What the Sanhedrin begins to see almost immediately after the Resurrection, and certainly after Pentecost, is that the disciples begin doing the same works as Jesus, just as Jesus said they would. So, it is the work of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, to reveal Jesus to the world.

Now, in the first half of the gospel, Jesus, in the Incarnation, revealed the Father to the world. Here in the church age, it is the Holy Spirit resident in the hearts of the beloved disciples that reveals who Jesus really is. That is a work that goes on for every generation, as long as there are souls to be saved. Of course, the evil one continues to attack the church and the beloved disciples of Jesus, as we're told in Revelation 12. Jesus reveals that if we want to overcome Satan in our personal lives, and also in the world, there's something very simple we can do. **Remain in him**. It's not complicated. That's why Revelation 17:14 says that it's the little people who remain in union with the Blessed Trinity are the ones who overcome the powers of evil. This is why Jesus emphasised in the final discourse, that if the beloved disciples would only stay in union with him, that the devil would have no power over them either. We've already heard him say, 'the devil has no power over me', but it's quite another matter for the devil to have no power over the branches of the Vine and the members of the Body. That's a different matter. So, we know how to stay safe spiritually - that is to remain in communion with the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.

So, Let's come to 16:12. Jesus said, "I still have many things to say to you, but they would be too much for you now". Now means just before the Passion. It's after the Resurrection and certainly after the coming of the Holy Spirit, that everything begins to fall together for them, and they begin to understand things they've never grasped before. "But when the Spirit of Truth comes, he will lead you into the whole truth, since he will not be speaking from himself, but he will say only what he has learned. He will tell you of the things to come. He will glorify me since all that he tells you will be taken from what is mine. Everything that the Father has is mine. This is why I say to you, all that he tells you will be taken from mine".

Here you have a wonderful revelation of how the three Persons in the Blessed Trinity work in tandem. During the ministry Jesus said he took everything from the Father. 'What the Father tells me is what I say. What the Father reveals is what I reveal. What the Father teaches is what I teach etcetera. Here we are told that the Holy Spirit will take everything from Jesus and give it to the disciples, to give to the world. So, Jesus took it from the Father, and the Holy Spirit takes it from Jesus. The Eternal Father, the first Person of the Blessed Trinity, is said to be the source of all truth. When His Son comes upon the Earth, he leans on everything that the Father has revealed; when the Holy Spirit comes to the Earth, he leans on everything the Father revealed to the Son. Why? Because the Son had it all. There was nothing left. The Holy Spirit won't give us something Jesus hadn't revealed.

Everything had been revealed. Jesus said that to the disciples, “I call you friends because I've told you everything. I've told you everything the Father has given to me”. So, everything has been lodged in them, and it is the Holy Spirit who will take it out piece by piece. So, we have this wonderful illustration of how the three Persons in the Blessed Trinity cooperate together as One. We also see the interdependence of the three divine Persons on each other, an interdependence and interflow of love, life and light between them that make the reality that we call love, life, light, truth; **that is who God is**. So, the Holy Spirit will reveal the whole truth piecemeal to both the church and each individual that opens up to the triune God. He will do what Wisdom in the OT did for any of the priests, prophets and kings who opened up to the Lord also. Wisdom 9:11 says, “she, (wisdom) will guide me prudently in all my undertakings and will protect me by her glory”.

That is exactly what the Holy Spirit will do in the church from the day of Pentecost. Wisdom 10:10 says, “the virtuous man was led by her (Wisdom) along straight paths. Jesus said what the prophets of the Old Testament said it also - that the path to God is straight. It's narrow, it's steep, but it's straight, whereas the paths of the world are winding and can go around in circles. “The virtuous man was led along straight paths. She showed him the Kingdom of God and taught him the knowledge of holy things”. That's exactly what the Holy Spirit will be doing, not just for the Apostles, but for all of the beloved disciples of Jesus. The Holy Spirit is also a spirit of prophecy. That means, as Jesus said, “he will tell you things to come also”. So, throughout the history of the Church there have been individuals gifted with prophecy or the ability to see into the future. Right now, in the world, there are quite a number of people in different places for whom the Lord is revealing what is happening on the Earth. So, this has been with the Church from the outset. Just as Jesus glorified the Father, during his ministry, the Holy Spirit glorifies Jesus through the ministry of the Church.

So now we come to the final section in Chapter 16. Jesus said, “In a short time, you will no longer see me, and then in a short time later you will see me”. Now, if you take this as said to the Apostles on the night that Jesus was betrayed, the night of Gethsemane, it means that in less than 24 hours, they won't see Jesus (in the flesh) again. Then in a very short time - that is the difference between Friday and Sunday - in three days, they will see him again. If you look at the whole of Church history then it means we won't see Jesus again until the final, glorious coming in the Parousia. So, we'll take that up in our next episode.

Thank you for listening. God bless you.