Testify About Me

John 15:18-16:4

Key Verse 15:26-27. “When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father---the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father---he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.”

John 15 is consisted of three parts about Jesus’ teaching and his disciples’ relationship. In verses 1-8 Jesus taught them their relationship with himself as a vine and its branches. Jesus said in verse 5, “*I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing*.” As branches must remain in the vine, so we also must remain in Jesus so that we may become fruitful. When we remain in Jesus, we receive the constant flow of life and the Holy Spirit through him. Jesus called his disciples “branches.”

In verses 9-17 Jesus taught them their relationship for each other. Jesus helped them to love each other as Jesus loved them. Jesus loved them until he gave his life for them. Jesus called them ‘friends.’ In verse 14 he said, “*You are my friends if you do what I command.*” Jesus’ command for his disciples was ‘*love each other*.’ Verse 17 says, “*This is my command” Love each other*.” Loving each other sounds easy, but it is far from it. Martin Luther, a great man in church history, also confessed. “God, I love you very much, but I don’t love people.” Loving others, even between husband and wife, parents and children, brothers and sisters, and among co-workers often requires self-denial with bone-crushing effort. Jesus showed a good example of how to love one another to his disciples by washing their feet. This was educationally symbolic, but it needed their obedience and practice. Jesus asks us to love each other as one gives his or her life for a friend. In verse 13 Jesus said, “*Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.*” What greater love is there than giving his or her life for their friends? Jesus did it. Jesus gave his life for us on the cross. When we are willing to die for our brothers and sisters, friends and co-workers, there will be no more conflict caused by our pride, selfishness, resentment, and anger. Do not look at them as your enemies, but as those whom God loves and cares. Jesus gave his life not only for us, but also for them, too.

In verses 18-27 Jesus taught his disciples about their attitude toward the world. Jesus foretold them what would happen to them after he was arrested and died on the cross. He also taught them how they could overcome the world and what they had to do at that time. His teaching was good not only for his disciples, but also for us who live in similar situations and generations.

First, the world hates you. (18-25) Jesus said in verse 18. “***If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.***” Jesus foretold to his disciples that the world would not welcome them, but hate them. How nice it would be if the world says to them, “Hi, brothers! We love you and adore you because you follow Jesus!” Around 30 years ago, not long after I arrived in USA, I met a middle-aged man at a gas station in LA. He asked me if I was a Christian. I wondered how he knew that I was a Christian. When I said yes, he immediately and joyfully replied, “Great! You are my brother.” I felt very good as I felt welcomed by this country. But as years went by, the reality and spiritual condition of this country did not get better. At school, at our workplaces, and in media Christians are often mistreated, ridiculed, marginalized, and even persecuted by ungodly people. So, our children and co-workers struggle to overcome peer pressure in order to maintain their identities as Christians day after day.

In verses 19-25 Jesus explained why the world hates his disciples and believers. First of all, the world hates them because of Jesus. Jesus said in verse 18, “*If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.*” The world hates Jesus because Jesus chose them out of the world. In verse 19 Jesus said, “***If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you***.” My personal Bible teacher in Korea used to be a heavy drunkard. He was invited to Bible study by the owner of an eye glasses store, where he stopped by to fix his glasses that had been broken from brawling at a drinking party. After the Bible study, he was converted as a Christian and quit his drinking and partying. Then his drinking friends and unbelieving boss at his workplace began to hate him and persecute him. They gave him a hard time because he did not belong to them anymore. They hated Jesus because Jesus had chosen him out of them. My Bible teacher kept his faith to the end. He overcame persecutions and hatred until God called him to heaven. This is not a story about my Bible teacher, but also a story for anyone who believes in Jesus and lives a holy life. Apostle Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:12, “*In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ will be persecuted*.”

Persecutions and trials against Christians, especially new beginners, may make us feel difficult and fall into temptation. Why did God give me difficulties when I decided to live a good life as a Christian? We may think our life is strange and going wrong. But, this is not true. What did Peter say about this in his letter? In 1 Peter 4:12-13, “*Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.*” In *The Screwtape Letters*, Satan’s strategy for misleading Christians is planting doubt about God’s love and his presence in their lives through hardships and difficulties. We expect all things to go well and problem-free after we start our life with Jesus. But, things often do not go as we expect. We may despair and doubt God’s love. But, at this moment, keep in mind that these things happen to make our faith strong and to help us to come closer and closer to God. Amen!

The world hates Jesus because Jesus took us away from it. We no longer belong to the world, but to Jesus. We are not their friend anymore, but a friend of Jesus. So, they hate Jesus. We used to belong to the world and became enemies of God. But now we belong to God and have become a friend of Jesus. Peter said in 1 Peter 2:9,10. “*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*” We are a chosen people who belong to God. We are God’s special possessions who do something great for his purpose. The more we live a holy life, the more we will be persecuted by the world.

Jesus told his disciples that the world hated him because the world was convicted by their own sin. Here, the world indicates unbelievers, God-haters, and persecutors. In verses 20b-24 Jesus said that the world would be convicted when they did not believe in Jesus’ teaching. Look at verses 20b-23. “***If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me hates my Father as well***.” Jesus’ teaching penetrated their souls like a sword. The word of God is living and active like a sharpened double-edged sword. (Heb 4:12) Jesus’ teaching exposes their hidden sins and evil thoughts and behaviors which they committed in darkness. His teaching appealed their conscience to repent. So, people who do not want to repent hate Jesus. They hate Christians, too because they hate Jesus who rebuked them to repent. They persecute Christians because we follow Jesus.

The world is convicted by their unbelief in God’s miracles which Jesus performed. Look at verses 24-25. “***If I had not done among them the works no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. As it is, they have seen, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: “They hated me without reason.***” Not only do people in the world not believe in God’s creation of the world, but also God’s works in each person’s life. They deny God’s creation in order to justify their unbelief and reject Jesus’ miraculous works in the Bible to defile God’s power. They make excuses by saying, “I will believe in God if it is proved.” But, Paul said in Romans 1:20-21, “*For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities---his eternal power and divine nature---have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.*” Thus far Jesus taught his disciples why the world hated them. Now he teaches them how to overcome this hostile world and what they have to do in the time of persecutions.

Second, testify about me (15:26-16:4) Look at verses 26, 27. “***When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father---the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father---he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.***” In these verses Jesus didn’t tell his disciples to avoid sufferings and persecutions, but to testify about him. Jesus asked them to have a positive attitude toward the hostile world by testifying about him. The word, ‘testify’ is ‘*martyreo*’ in Greek, which is the same word root with ‘*martys,*’ which means ‘witness’. (Acts 1:8 and 22:20) So, at that time testifying about Jesus implied being ‘martyred or killed because of Jesus’ name.’ Wow! It’s sacred. But, we don’t have to be scared because Jesus will send an Advocate for us. The Advocate is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, who came from the Father to help us (14:25). Jesus said in 14:26, “*But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you*.” The Holy Spirit is called ‘the Another Counselor’ or ‘the Another Comforter’ in other versions of the Bible. The Holy Spirit will help us when we testify about Jesus. He will give us wisdom and power when we teach the gospel of Jesus Christ.

One of the merits and strong points of Christianity is a positive attitude toward sufferings and difficulties. Jesus said in the Sermon on a Mount in Matthew 5:3-12, ‘*Blessed are the pure in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted…Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven*…” Jesus taught his disciples to be glad when they were persecuted because of his name. When we reach out on campus or on the street to testify about Jesus, how wonderful would it be if we are welcomed. But, this is often not the case. We are often rejected and then dejected. Some may become sad and feel bad. Others may become mad. But, we don’t have to be sad, get mad, or feel bad, but be glad. We must be glad because our reward in heaven will be great. Remember that because of Jesus’ name the more we are rejected, the more our reward in heaven will be stored.

Moses was a prince of Egypt. He could have lived as Pharaoh, the King of Egypt if he had hidden his identity as the son of a Hebrew slave. But when he grew up, he refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward (reward in heaven). (He 11:24-26) Moses chose a short-term pain for the long-term gain. Peter the Apostle said, “*But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed*.” (1Pe 4:13)

Why, then, is testifying about Jesus important and necessary? Jesus is the way and the truth and the life. He is the only true way for our eternal life (salvation). Jesus said to his disciples in Luke 24:46-48. “He told them, “*This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.*” You came to know why testifying Jesus is important and necessary through the life-testimony of Rev. Ryu at the conference. Rev. Ryu, pastor of the Central Presbyterian Church in DC, one of the biggest churches in DC, testified that he came to know Jesus Christ personally through one on one Bible study with a UBF missionary. Because of the missionary’s persistent prayer and faithful Bible study, pastor Ryu finally became a pastor for 10,000 church members. We don’t know a young man or woman’s future. Who knows if God will raise spiritual leaders like Moses and pastors like Ryu among our Bible students and children? Above all, testifying Jesus is fulfilling the will of God for world salvation and expanding the kingdom of God on this earth. We cannot fulfill the will of God by our own will power. We need the Holy Spirit. We need the Advocate who will go ahead of us and help us while we testify about Jesus. The work of conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit. The work of renewal is also the work of the Holy Spirit. May the Holy Spirit be with us and help us when we go out for fishing and preaching! Amen.

In 16:1-4, Jesus predicted impending sufferings and persecutions against his disciples and Christians so that they might be prepared and not fall away. He said in 16:1, “***All this I have told you so that you will not fall away***.” At that time God’s enemies would put them out of the synagogues and kill them. They would think that they would offer a service to God by persecuting Christians. Saul, who became later Paul, did what Jesus had predicted. Jesus warned his disciples to remember Jesus’ words so that they might not fall away, but stand firm in his name. (4) Let us love each other as Jesus commended us. Instead of avoiding sufferings, let us participate in the sufferings of Christ for his name’s sake because our reward in heaven will be great! Amen!