

I. Intro

A. There are reasons the classics are classics. There are reasons certain books and movies stand out. Stand above the others. They are much, much better. They capture life better. They are full of insight about the human condition that they transcend time and culture. They help us understand the world and ourselves. As a result they are read and reread (or watched and rewatched).

B. One of those books is Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*, with its classic opening line:

1. It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to heaven, we were all going direct the other way—in short, the period was so far like the present period...

C. I share that because I suspect you can rehearse a number of the ways that this is – if not the worst of times – a bad time. You are aware that many things are going poorly.

1. The war. The debt. The Anger.

2. Mental Illness is up. Public trust is down. There is a lot of tension. There is a lot of yelling.

3. There is sexual confusion. There are deaths of despair – last week I lost a fifth fraternity brother to a death of despair.

4. Neo-Nazi's announced they were targeting Highland Park for a Day of Hate – which was some sort of ugly and unthinkable anti-Semitic act.

D. I could go on. I don't have to. You know that many things are broken. However, if you've been paying attention to what I've been saying – and what I've been writing – you've heard me make note of how many things are going right, especially in light of the last hundred years:

1. Life expectancy and standards of living are up. Crime and extreme poverty are down. We are fixing – or have already fixed – lots of problems. The ozone hole is closed. Acid rain is gone. Rivers are getting cleaner. We are working less. More people have access to clean water and electricity.

2. I'm not a fan of Steven Pinker, the Harvard psychologist, but I've appreciated his effort to note how many things are going right. Others are as well.

3. Last week I read an article by Larry Summers, the former Secretary of the Treasury under Clinton and former President of Harvard, arguing that, given a choice between being a poor student living in the US today or living the life of John Rockefeller not quite 100 years ago, we'd be better off being poor today.

E. I share this to say, one of the ways to manage the challenges of the moment

1. and that is part of what is supposed to happen on this day.

2. We do not exist for the Sabbath. The Sabbath exists for us. And it was established not simply so we had a break a from work, but so we could be restored, recharged and realigned. So we had a better, clearer, more accurate take on what was going on and what should be going on.

F. Part of the way to navigate the challenges we are up against is to note that many things are going well.

G. A second thing we are to do is to realize that in Christ, things end well. As a Christian, we are to be shaped by the promises of God. We do not know what happens between now and the end, but we know the end. God wins. If you are in Christ, this ends well. Eternity changes everything.

1. As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4: “Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.”

H. And it turns out there is a third thing – and that is to expect challenges. In our passage today we are told to expect hard. And to prepare.

II. Review

A. This is the 8th sermon in The Life, this series in which we are trying to mine the second half of the Gospel of John – the teaching and events of the last week of Christ’s life – in order to thrive. In order to move into the abundant life that Christ spoke of in John 10:10.

B. You have heard me say, the Gospel of John – like the other Gospels – has a few objectives. The biggest one is to persuade us to become Christ-followers – to believe that He is God. The Messiah. The Savior. That is the reason John gives at the end.

1. He says, “I have written these things so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing we may have life in his name.”

C. Well, in addition to calling us to faith, the book was also written so we know what it looks like to follow him. And as we pick up our passage today, we are being coached about what is coming and how we should respond.

1. They are at the Passover Meal.

2. Judas has already left to betray him. Jesus has told the others – yet again – that he is going to die.

3. And he is told them that they will be OK, in part because he is sending the Holy Spirit.

D. What we are about to hear is that we should expect hard, but that hard brings opportunities – to trust and to grow.

III. I am reading now in John 15:18: **If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.** If the world – there are a couple different Greek terms that are translated *world* – which in this section shows up a lot. The one used here is *kosmos*. It has a number of meanings. In this case it means “those alienated from God.”¹ Which in this case, meant those who wanted nothing to do with God and the religious leaders who Jesus singled out for reprimand because they were so self-righteous and misguided.

IV. **If the world hates you, keep in mind they hated me first.** Jesus was disliked. This should not be new news. After all, he is killed. Those who view him only as a nice guy who told everyone to be kind and use their inside voice, are left needing to explain why he was so threatening to so many that he ends up crucified. As a general rule, you do not crucify Mr. Rogers.

V. **V19: If the world hates you, keep in mind they hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own.** A reminder, we do not belong to this world. That doesn't mean we are not interested in it. We are called to love the people and to be stewards of the world. We have dual citizenship. But our primary identity is found as citizens of another kingdom. Citizens of – to cite Augustine – the City of God.

VI. **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. Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.'** He is telling us to expect hard. The premise here is that we can endure hard, but hard is a lot less hard if we expect it. Read about a guy who showed up for Coast Guard Boot camp with a fishing pole and water skis. The recruiter had told him he'd be at a place where you could fish and water ski.

VII. **Remember what I told you: a servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.** And they did persecute Jesus, so expect it.

VIII. **If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.** (B/c, of course, we are to make his teaching ours). **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. 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. V25: But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: 'They hated me without reason.'**

IX. **“When the Advocate comes.** Remember, this is the Holy Spirit. He is also called the Spirit, the Comforter, the Paraclete and the Advocate.

X. **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.**

XI. Jesus is talking to his team just before he goes to his death. These are his last minute instructions. He suggests that they should expect to be disliked and misunderstood. Why? Well, he is telling them so they will not be surprised – because that would make it worse. But, what does he think they will do that will make them disliked?

A. It should be clear to anyone who reads the Bible that we should expect to be disliked. If this passage is not clear enough for you:

a) We could look to 2 Tim 3:12, where Paul says: all who live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

b) Or the Book of Acts, where Christians fall out of favor right away and end up persecuted and martyred for the next 250 years.

A. After noting that martyrdom is a special category set aside for a select few, one commentator on this passage wrote: “persecution is the normal experience of every Christian everywhere. It looks different in different places and at different times. It might be stiff fines or family shame, or being kicked off a college campus. It might be laws against sharing our faith, unjust trials, public mockery or scorn. It might be arrest and brutality. But if we faithfully follow Jesus in this world, we all will face persecution at some point...”²

B. Why? Not for being jerks – which does happen. Have you heard of the Fruit of the Spirit.

1. It seems obvious that it is not because he is calling on us to act in selfish and immature ways – to be jerks. In Galatians 5, the qualities that are expected to define us are listed: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

2. If we are being disliked – if you think you are being persecuted for your faith – it’s important to ask, “am I being a jerk?” Or maybe a more pointed question, “In what ways am I being a jerk?” Tragically, there are plenty of examples of Christians acting in ugly and selfish ways. There are plenty of examples where we act like just another political voting block that fights for their own benefits, rather than fights for the widow and orphan.

3. Not always. As you may have read, Walt Liefeld – who served as the senior pastor here in the late 80s and early 90s fell this week and broke his hip. Walt is 95. I’ve been speaking to his son, Dave, about this. And the generally good news is that he had surgery on Friday and it went quite well. But, Dave said, “It’s serious and he is in a lot of pain. But he remains so kind. He is so attentive to the needs of others. He remains very gracious.”

a) I told Sheri, I’m scared that at some point I am going to lose my filters and people around me are going to say, “He was a pastor?”

4. There are people who are deeply shaped by the Fruit of the Spirit. And they are hard to dislike.

5. But not all. We have a long way to go to get to the point where we are disliked only for the right reasons.

6. This is not a new problem. Last week I interviewed John Dickson, a Wheaton professor, on his book, Bullies and Saints, which I commend. He takes an unblinking look at all the church has done wrong. But also all it has done right.

C. But our passage suggests other two reasons we may be disliked.

1. First: Jesus exposes sin. He brings in an absolute truth from the outside. In verse 21, Jesus says, **“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.** Let me note, the world is not thrilled by the absolute standards that Jesus teaches.

a) I’m not sure when you last read the Sermon on the Mount, which is Jesus commentary on the Law. But it is full of absolute statements. It is full of moral demands. Jesus ruffled feathers. He pointed out hypocrisy. He raised the bar.

(1) He brought truth from an outside source – from beyond the world – and told people they needed to accept it.

(2) This was not popular then. It is anathema now. We live in a culture that exalts human autonomy and individual freedom above just about everything else.

(3) At this moment, many believe that we get to define ourselves – that there is no metanarrative that we have to adopt. There are no universal standards. We are free to believe whatever we want to believe. And if we say it is true, others are expected to agree. And if they do not, they are deemed a bigot.

(4) Jesus does not play this game. He loves people, but he also Jesus says no. He suggests there is a truth from the outside.

(5) We should not expect this to be popular.

2. Second, if you are a Christ-follower, you do not belong. The world cannot – should not - own you or be able to control you.

a) When people around you are going all in for the firm or the party or the team – when they are placing that first – you cannot. You cannot sell out for something else. You cannot be owned by anything else. Because your first allegiance needs to be for Christ.

b) Which leaves you looking like the odd person out, and which leaves them feeling judged.

c) But we can't go all in for the firm or the political party or the team because we have gone all in for Jesus. He is the vine we now grow on, and he has cut our other roots.

D. And there are other reasons:

1. The world does not like the exclusive claims we point to. This had always been the offense.

a) It seems very narrow to say that Jesus is “the way, the truth and the life and that no one gets to the father except through him.

b) As a Christ-follower – as someone who And we learn to trust him on some of the details we can't understand.

2. The world can feel judged when we make certain choices.

a) The changes in our life – our decision to love and forgive and serve and give our money away – challenges the way they live.

XII. So, we should expect hard. This is the big point today. I started by noting that lots of things are going right. And that we need to live in light of eternity. A third way to manage the challenges of life is to expect them.

A. I want to note one more thing as we start to wrap up. It is found in the first few verses of chapter 16.

XIII. Jesus says, **All this I have told you so that you will not fall away.** Jesus says to his followers – hours before his betrayal. Less than a day before his death – expect to suffer. And I am telling you this because if you think following me means easy, you are being set up to fail. And you may walk away from the faith.

A. At this moment we are hearing about revival on about twenty college campuses. It is a wonderful respite from the more common story that people are walking away from the faith.

B. Look – the common refrain needs to be qualified in ways few in the news understand.

1. As I have said a lot, the church around the world is growing. The church in Iran, the church in China and Vietnam and South America – the church in Nigeria – these churches are growing. Many are coming to faith.

2. It is the church in Western Europe and the US that are struggling. But even here the story is complicated.

- C. But, yes, there are people who called themselves Christians who are rethinking their commitments.
1. This is not a new thing. Paul writes about Demas, who has fallen away. The writer of Hebrews writes about this in Hebrews 6.
- D. Today it gets bundled under the term, “deconstruction.”
- E. For what it’s worth, I do not think it is possible for us to loss our salvation. I think many people who think they are Christians are not. And I think it is possible to fall away in bad ways – and harden our heart. And lose our joy and more.
1. And I am not inclined to offer easy answers to people when the word of God is issuing such an unsettling warning.
- F. The point to be made here is, Jesus warns us to expect hard so that when hard comes the challenge drives us closer to God not away.
- G. He tells us to be ready because trials are hard enough on their own, they are really hard if you are surprised or you think God has left you. When you think that the hard life has not part of the life we are invited into.
1. I was briefly at two funerals yesterday. And they were sad, but those grieving were being cared for by family and friends – by their small groups.
 2. And that is sweet to see.
- H. And really, more than that, he asks us to trust him that he has this under control – that it’s all good. And if God – who can see the end from the beginning. If Jesus – who knows everything and took upon Himself the lion’s share of human suffering – says things are under control, I want to encourage you to relax.
- I. And as an aside, if you took the time to list the worst things that have ever happened to you, then list the best things. I think you’d be astonished by how many of those best things came out of the worst things. Not all. We cannot see that yet. But we can trust.
- J. Many people mistakenly think, in coming to faith they are signing up for the “live will be easy” club. No. No. No.
- K. God cares more about our character than our comfort. And He is on record saying, “expect hard.”
- L. I would go on to say, given the Book of Job and other passages, we should expect hard that we do not understand.
1. Lord, what are you doing? What possibly are you doing?
- M. In Romans 8 we are told that God is working all things together for the good of those who love him.
- N. In James we are being told that trials can be a blessing and an opportunity to grow.
- O. In countless examples – such as Joseph being sold into slavery – we see where God redeems bad things in wonderful ways.
- P. My point here is – in the final hours of his life, Jesus said to his followers:
1. Expect hard and leverage it. And do not be anxious about it. I’ve got this and I will be back.
 2. Yes, this broken world is a mess and life is hard.
 3. Be aware – many things are going well
 4. Eternity changes everything

5. And it will not be nearly as hard if you are expecting hard as if you are not.
Expect hard.

¹ William Hendriksen, The Gospel of John, Baker, 1953, p. 79, Footnote 76

² Kevin DeYoung