

Main Idea: In John 16:1-4 Jesus' warning about impending danger helps us in two ways. First, it protects, then it prompts.

- I. Jesus' warning protects us (1-3).
 - A. We have a duty (1).
 1. When hard times come, we must not be surprised.
 2. What's more, we must not get sidetracked.
 - B. We will face danger (2).
 1. For some, there will be excommunication.
 2. For others, there will be execution.
 - C. We are dealing with darkness (3).
 1. A person is in the dark if he doesn't know the Father.
 2. A person is in the dark if he doesn't know Jesus.
- II. Jesus' warning prompts us (4).
 - A. We must remember what Jesus said.
 1. It doesn't make the problem go away.
 2. It does give us security.
 - B. We must remember what Jesus did.
 1. He was once here.
 2. He left by way of the cross.
 3. He is coming again.

Response: Let's make a commitment to follow the King.

1. To follow Him, you must first know Him.
2. To follow Him, you must go wherever He leads.

Suppose you were driving down the road in your car, and all of the sudden, you came upon a sign that said this, "Warning: Danger Ahead!" What would you do? You might turn around or look for an alternate route. In the least, you would slow down and proceed with caution. Why do we have warning signs? Warning signs alert us to impending danger.

Friends, if you want to be a Christian, be assured there is danger ahead, and this morning we're going to look at a warning sign, if you will, posted by Jesus.

Earlier in the week I read an article in *The Weekly Standard* called "The War on Christians." Paul Marshall begins his article with these alarming words:

For at least three reasons, the contemporary persecution of Christians demands attention: It is occurring on a massive scale, it is underreported, and in many parts of the world it is rapidly growing. The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life finds that Christians are suffering persecution in more places today than any other religious group; between 2006 and 2012, Pew says, they were targeted for harassment in 151 countries—three-quarters of the world's states. Similar findings are reported by the Vatican, *Newsweek*, the *Economist*, and the 60-year-old Christian support group Open Doors. Most people in the West are unaware of these facts, though that may be changing.¹

I found the article very eye-opening. I think most of us have a sense that the world's hostility towards Christians is increasing, but the article validates that sense with example after example.

Marshall cites the desperate plight of Meriam Ibrahim, for instance, who gave birth in a Sudanese prison just the other day. She was raised a Christian, but after officials learned that her long-absent father was a Muslim, she was sentenced to death for

*** Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ http://m.weeklystandard.com/articles/war-christians_794945.html?nopager=1

apostasy—for leaving Islam. And since in Sudan a Muslim woman may not be married to a Christian, her marriage to her American husband was declared void, and she was convicted of adultery and sentenced to 100 lashes to be administered before her execution. These punishments will be dropped if she renounces her Christian faith, which she steadfastly refuses to do.

Let me keep reading:

Another case receiving attention is North Korea's sentencing of a South Korean missionary, Kim Jong-uk, to life with hard labor. On May 30, he was convicted of espionage and trying to start a church. North Korea also still holds Kenneth Bae, an American sentenced to 15 years' hard labor on charges of trying to use religion to overthrow the political system.

The Chinese government's demolition of the 3,000-member Sanjiang church in Wenzhou on April 28 was newsworthy partly because of the church's size, but also because Sanjiang was not an "underground" church but an official, approved, government-registered "Three-Self" church. Some 20 other official churches in the area have had all or parts of their buildings removed or demolished, and hundreds more are threatened with destruction.

And, most notorious, the abduction into slavery of hundreds of schoolgirls in Nigeria on April 14 by the al Qaeda-linked Boko Haram... While the kidnapped girls include Muslims (Boko Haram regards them as apostates because of their Western education), most are Christians, seized in a predominantly Christian area and now subjected to forced conversion.

These events get media attention because they are particularly poignant, or dramatic, or involve foreigners, but our media miss countless other stories. Since the kidnappings, Boko Haram has killed—not kidnapped, killed—hundreds of people, many in the predominantly Christian Gwoza area of Borno State, destroyed 36 churches, and kidnapped at least 8 more girls. On June 1, it attacked a Christian area in neighboring Adamawa state, killing 48 people. In Sudan, a second woman, Faiza Abdalla, has been arrested on suspicion of converting to Christianity, and on April 8 a court terminated her marriage to a Catholic. Iran is imprisoning and torturing pastors from the rapidly growing house church movement, including an American citizen, Pastor Saeed Abedini. Vietnam has imprisoned over 60 Christian leaders. Eritrea holds more than 1,000 Christians in conditions so inhumane that prisoners die or are permanently crippled. In Somalia, in an ignored religious genocide, Al-Shabaab systematically hunts Christians and kills those it finds...

The persecution of Christians is widespread—Nigeria is where most are actually being killed, North Korea is the most repressive, China represses the largest number...

In the last decade, half of Iraq's Christians have fled the country, and many others have fled to the Kurdish region. In three days last August, Egypt's Coptic Christians experienced the worst single attack against their churches in 700 years—with 40 churches utterly destroyed and over 100 other sites severely damaged. Tens of thousands of Copts are estimated to have fled their homeland. Syria's Christians, like all Syrians, are caught in the middle of a brutal war, but...they are also victims of beheadings, summary executions, kidnappings, and forcible conversions, in deliberate efforts to suppress or eradicate their religious faith.

So this morning we come to a warning sign text that Jesus put next to the road two thousand years ago. In John 16:1-4, the Savior told His disciples that there was danger ahead, not just for Him, but for them, too.

Why did Jesus give His followers this warning sign? So they could flee, or look for an alternate route? No. Why then? I want you to notice at the outset two purpose clauses in our text.

Verse 1—“All this I have told you **so that** you will not go astray.”

And verse 4—“I have told you this, **so that** when the time comes you will remember that I warned you.”

Notice the repetition. Twice Jesus said, “I have told you this,” and twice He told them why, “So that.” So why this warning sign from Jesus? It helps us in two ways. First, it protects, then it prompts.

I. Jesus’ warning protects us (1-3).

The scene was sober that night. Jesus had already told the Twelve many things. He told them about His impending death, the betrayal by one of them and the denial by all of them. They hardly knew what to say.

Our text begins with Jesus saying, “All this I have told you so that you will not go astray (1).” I considered entitling this message, “What You Need to Know So You Won’t Go Astray.” That is what is at stake here, according to Jesus, going astray.

This raises the question, “What’s *all this*?” Jesus said the “all this” is what keeps a disciple from going astray. What had Jesus just told the disciples?

The overall context is the Upper Room Discourse of John 14-15, in which Jesus sought to prepare His followers for His departure. The immediate context is John 15, where He told them the key to a fruitful life is abiding in Him. Then in the latter half of John 15, He told the Twelve minus Judas that the world would hate them (19), that His Spirit would come and help them (26), and that they were to testify about Him (27). “All this I have told you.”

I want you to look back at the very words Jesus just spoke in John 15:18-27. Pay careful attention to the repeated use of the term “hate.”

“If the world **hates** you, keep in mind that it **hated** me first. 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. Remember the words I spoke to you: ‘No servant is greater than his master.’ 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. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin. He who **hates** me **hates** my Father as well. If I had not done among them what no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen these miracles, 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.’ “When the Counselor 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.”

So the world is going to hate you, Jesus said, just like it hated me. Why did Jesus give them this dismal warning? Here’s why, purpose #1, “All this I have told you **so that** you will not” do something.

In order to protect His followers, Jesus speaks bluntly about three subjects in verses 1-3.

A. We have a duty (1). Just what is our duty? We see it in verse 1.

No doubt, the unspoken question on the disciples' minds must have been, "Jesus, why are you telling us these things, this terrible news about the world's hatred?"

What was Jesus' answer? Verse 1, "So that you will not go astray." The KJV says, "So you won't be offended." What does that mean?

The Greek term is *skandalizo*. What English word do you hear in that? Scandal. We know all about scandals in our day, don't we? Scandals involving religious leaders, scandals involving politicians, and professional athletes, and music stars. A scandal is the result of someone tripping up.

By definition, the word in verse 1 means "to put a trap in the way which would cause a person to stumble." It carries the idea of surprise.

When I was growing up, I had a friend who was in to trapping. He trapped muskrats, mink, and other small animals to sell the furs. I learned that a key to success in trapping is surprise. You don't set the trap where the animal can see it. Your aim is to catch him off guard. Put the trap in the place where he'd least suspect it. Surprise him.

Here's Jesus' point, "Disciples, danger is coming. The reason I'm telling you this is so that when it does, you won't be caught off guard."

Brothers and sisters...

1. *When hard times come, we must not be surprised.*

2. *What's more, we must not get sidetracked.* We mustn't turn away from the Lord and choose the course of least resistance. That's not an option.

To put it in positive terms, we have a duty. Our duty is to be loyal to Christ, and that involves refusing to "go astray" and get "offended" when things don't go smoothly.

By the way, don't miss an important sidelight here. The discipler is responsible to inform the disciplee that the Christian life is not a bed of roses. That's what Jesus did. And when we disciple new believers, we need to follow the Lord's example and warn them that opposition is inevitable. We must tell them, "You're on a high now, and that's great. It's thrilling to be a Christian! But remember, the same roller coaster that goes up soon comes down. Right now, you can't get enough of the Bible. You're so excited you can't be in church enough. You FEEL great. Remember that feeling. But don't base your Christian life on that feeling, for feelings change, and when they do, you must not go astray."

We have a duty. A second subject...

B. We will face danger (2). "They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God."

No, Jesus never said the Christian life would be easy. Just the opposite. He said, "Proceed with caution. There's danger ahead."

One of the great disservices of the "health and wealth" gospel preachers of our day is this. They minimize the danger.

William Tyndale knew that his duty involved danger. Tyndale lived in the 16th century. His sole passion in life was to translate the Bible into the English language so even the common people could read it. He met great opposition from the religious leaders. He was severely persecuted, and eventually burned at the stake. In spite of all of this, here's what he said, "I never expected anything else."²

He expected to suffer for Jesus. Sadly, too often we're ready to throw in the towel when someone takes our seat in church. Why are we surprised when we have to suffer for Christ? Our Lord said we would face danger, and He mentions two kinds.

1. *For some, there will be excommunication.* "They will put you out of the synagogue." We might think, "Well, big deal, if you're forced to leave one synagogue,

² Barclay, p. 189.

just find another one.” That’s a common attitude towards churches today. That’s also why we miss the severity of Jesus’ warning.

For a Jew to be put out of the synagogue was to be cut off from the good life. Jewish life revolved around the synagogue. It was the place of worship. It was the place of teaching. It was also the place of educational opportunity. Remember, Jesus’ disciples were Jews. To be put out of the synagogue was to be ostracized from the community. It affected you financially as well as relationally. If you were put out you were cut off from your family and cut off from social contacts.

Barclay is right, “Sometimes loneliness among men is the price of fellowship with God.”³ That’s what Jesus said would happen to His followers. For some, and this certainly was the case with the apostles, there will be excommunication.

2. *For others, there will be execution.* Verse 2 again, “A time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God.” Jesus’ words are solemn, “You will be killed for being My followers. You’re going to face terrible persecution.”

The book of Acts bears record to this reality. Stephen was stoned. James beheaded. So does the record of history. Countless early Christians were hunted down like animals. Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs* documents stories of believers who were burned at the stake, knee-caps smashed, children drowned, joints systematically and excruciatingly dislocated. And why? Because they were bad people? No. Simply because they identified themselves as followers of Christ.⁴

And to this day the martyrdom continues. In the past century, five missionaries were murdered by the Aucas in Ecuador, and who knows how many Christians were imprisoned and executed in the former Soviet Union and in Ceaușescu’s Romania. And think of men like Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Paul Schneider who died at the hands the Nazis. And the countless numbers who died in China under Mao’s purges (conservative estimates are 12 million), some because they were Christians.

Back in the ‘80’s, an average of 3 pastors a week were being put to death in Ethiopia. “Most missiologists estimate that there were more Christian martyrs in the 20th century than in all of the previous centuries of the Christian era combined.”⁵

Yet there’s something even more shocking than these numbers. It’s the reality that some of the most severe persecutions in history past have come *in the name of God*. The killers were religious people, men who were convinced they were doing the will of God.

That’s exactly what Jesus predicted. “Whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service (KJV).” The word “service” is the same word used of acts of genuine worship and service in the Bible (see Rom 12:1).

Think of zealous Saul of Tarsus. He hunted down Christians before he became one, convinced he was pleasing God. Think of the Crusades. People were killed by sincere zealots, in the name of religion. In the Spanish Inquisition, men thought they were serving God when they tortured heretics into accepting what they considered to be the true faith. As they saw it, they were saving men from hell.⁶

And this is hard to fathom, yet true. When Archbishop Cranmer was burned, his executioners actually preached a sermon while he died!

³ Barclay, p. 190.

⁴ Carson, 129.

⁵ Carson, 129.

⁶ Barclay, 190.

You may wonder, "How could a person be so deluded to think that he is doing God a favor by eliminating Christians? It doesn't make sense, does it?"

No. That's what Jesus explains next, in verse 3.

C. We are dealing with darkness (3). "They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me."

"The world hates you," Jesus said back in chapter 15. But the world is not just the secular, but includes the religious. You see, biblical Christianity is offensive to those who have mere religion, including those who possess cultural Christianity.

Ponder this observation by D. A. Carson, "Nowhere is the world's hatred more clearly set forth than in many people who judge themselves to be 'liberal' but who are most illiberal when it comes to Christian absolutes. They demonstrate their forbearance and large-hearted goodness when they confront diverse opinions, varied lifestyles and even idiotic practices. But if some Christian claims that Christianity is exclusive (as Jesus insisted), or that moral absolutes exist because they are grounded in the character of God (as the Bible teaches), or that there is a hell to be shunned as well as a heaven to be gained, the most intemperate language is used to excoriate the poor fool. The world hates."⁷

And here's why. We are dealing with *darkness*. What did Jesus say is the reason the world hates? What motivates people to try to get rid of biblical Christianity? Verse 3, "They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me." (see also 15:21).

According to verse 3, who is in the dark? There are two very basic identifying marks.

1. *A person is in the dark if he doesn't know the Father.* And...

2. *A person is in the dark if he doesn't know Jesus.* These two go hand in hand.

If you want to know the Father you must know His Son, Jesus. "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except by me." Who said that? Jesus did (John 14:6).

It doesn't make sense that the world hates Christianity. It's illogical. But Jesus predicted it would be so, two thousand years ago when He talked frankly to His first followers about these three things: duty, danger, and darkness. He put up a WARNING sign. Why? To protect us from going astray.

But Jesus' warning serves a second purpose as well. First, it protects us. Then...

II. Jesus' warning prompts us (4).

Have you heard the story about the pastor who was preaching about heaven? He warned his people that death was coming, and asked the members of his congregation to stand if they could answer yes to one of two questions: "Are you going to heaven? And, if you don't know for sure, do you want to go to heaven?" One little boy remained seated. The pastor singled him out and said, "Son, do you mean you don't want to go to heaven when you die?" The boy replied, "Sure, when I die. I thought you were getting a bunch together to go today."⁸

The boy was obviously confused about the pastor's instructions. Jesus doesn't want us to be confused, so He made it very clear.

He gave us the warning sign, first, to protect us from doing something ("I have told you this so you *will not go astray*"). But also to prompt us to do something ("I have told you this so that when the time comes *you will remember*").

⁷ Carson, p. 116.

⁸ from *Handbook of Contemp. Preaching*, 206

Remember. We're so prone to forget. What must we remember? Two things...

A. We must remember what Jesus said. "I have told you this, so that when the time comes..." Notice Jesus said "when" not "if." Hostility is inevitable. And what did Jesus want His disciples to DO when they were ridiculed, excommunicated, and even killed? REMEMBER. "When the time comes you will remember that I warned you."

"What good does remembering do?" you ask. That's a good question.

1. *It doesn't make the problem go away.* Again, it's *when* not *if*.

2. *It does give us security.* How's that? When we feel the world's hatred, it can actually strengthen our faith in Jesus. It gives us the opportunity to remember, "This is exactly what Jesus predicted would happen. He knows what's happening in my life!" And another thing. If the trials happen just as Jesus said, I can count on the glory to follow, too!

There's something else we need to remember, first what Jesus *said*, then...

B. We must remember what Jesus did. Verse 4 again, "I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you. I did not tell you this at first because I was with you."

Please keep this in mind. Jesus didn't give this warning to scare us off. No, Jesus warns us, first, so we won't be surprised and go astray. And second, so we will be secure and *remember*.

What Jesus had just announced was new information to His disciples. Yes, He had already told them they would be persecuted (Matt 5:11-12), but until now He had not spelled out the details quite so vividly. He waited until the night before His crucifixion to tell them.

Why not earlier? Why had He waited? Here's the answer He gave (4), "I did not tell you this at first because I was with you."

There's why He waited. As long as He was with them, the venom of the enemy was directed at Him, not them. He shielded them. But that was about to change. Now, as He says in the next verse, He was leaving (5).

Friends, if we're going to stand in dangerous times we must remember not only what Jesus *said*, but also what He *did*. What did He do? We're told three things right here.

1. *He was once here.* "I was with you," He said. But He couldn't remain on earth forever, not the first time He came. Why not? Because He came to do a work. And how did He conclude His work?

2. *He left by way of the cross.* You see, the work Jesus came to do was to save a people by giving His life as a ransom payment for their sins. That means He did for you what you cannot do, live a perfect life, and when He died on the cross He took upon Himself the penalty you deserve to pay for your sin. Three days later He rose again.

So He who was once here left by way of the cross. He had to leave. There was no other way. And today He offers forgiveness and eternal life to anyone who will repent and receive Him as their Savior and Lord.

That includes you, my friend. And there's something else we need to remember.

3. *He is coming again.* For Jesus the suffering was temporary. So for His people. Look at verse 16, "In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me." And verse 22, "Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy."

When do you tell your child that he or she is going to get a shot from the doctor? There are two basic approaches. One is the surprise technique. Don't give them a clue as to what's happening until they see the Dr. pull out the needle! The other is to tell them

about it ahead of time--not a week ahead of time, for that would create needless anxiety. Just before leaving, to prepare them.

On His final night with His men, Jesus warned them about the pain that would be ahead. Why? First, to protect them from going astray. And second, to prompt them to remember what He said and did.

A little over a century ago a young man by the name of Ernest W. Shurtleff wrote a hymn for the graduation ceremony at Andover Theological Seminary. He was a member of the class of 1888.⁹ And this was his prayer song, a battle song of commitment.

*Lead on, O King eternal,
The day of march has come;
Henceforth in fields of conquest
Thy tents shall be our home.
Through days of preparation
Thy grace has made us strong;
And now, O King eternal,
We lift our battle song.
Lead on, O King eternal,
Till sin's fierce war shall cease,
And holiness shall whisper
The sweet amen of peace.
For not with swords' loud clashing,
Nor roll of stirring drums;
With deeds of love and mercy
The heavenly kingdom comes.
Lead on, O King eternal,
We follow, not with fears,
For gladness breaks like morning
Where'er Thy face appears.
Thy cross is lifted over us,
We journey in its light;
The crown awaits the conquest;
Lead on, O God of might.*

Response: Let's make a commitment to follow the King.

To follow Jesus is to travel the way of the cross. Yes, the blessings are great and the rewards are eternal. Yet the danger is inevitable. If you want to be a Christian, it will not cost you anything to be saved, for Jesus paid it all. But it will cost you everything to live for Him in this hostile world.

Vance Havner says that at the Nicene Council, which was an important church meeting in the fourth century AD, of the 318 delegates attending, fewer than 12 had not lost an eye or a hand or did not limp on a leg lamed by torture for their Christian faith.

I don't know for sure if those numbers are accurate, but I do know heaven is filled with believers who lost limbs and life for their beloved Christ.

Archaeologists digging in the remains of a school in Rome found a picture dating from the third century. It shows a boy standing, his hand raised, worshiping a figure on a cross, a figure that looks like a man with the head of an ass. Scrawled in the writing of a young person are the words, "Alexamenos worships his God." Nearby there's a second

⁹ <http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/l/e/leadonok.htm>

inscription, "Alexamenos is faithful." Apparently, a young man who was a Christian was being mocked by his schoolmates for his faithful witness. But he was not ashamed; he was faithful.¹⁰

That's the kind of devotion we need today, a devotion that looks danger in the eye and says, "Am I a soldier of the cross, a follower of the Lamb? And shall I fear to own His cause, or blush to speak His name? Must I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease, while others fought to win the prize and sailed through bloody seas?"¹¹

Are you willing to follow Christ on those terms? Someone asked C.S. Lewis, "Why do the righteous suffer?" "Why not?" he replied. "They're the only ones who can take it."

That's what the church needs today, men and women, boys and girls, who will count the cost, and exalt Christ no matter what. Simply put, the church today needs *soldiers*. The church is not a country club. It's a training ground for soldiers.

If you're interested here's what it takes, two things.

1. *To follow Him, you must first know Him. Not about Him, but know Him.* Specifically, know Him as the One who saved *you* through faith. But that's just the beginning, for...

2. *To follow Him, you must go wherever He leads.*

¹⁰ [Lieghton Ford, *Good News is for Sharing*, 1977, David C. Cook Publishing Co., p. 78.](#)

¹¹ Hymn by Isaac Watts