

John 15:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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 your's also.

Analysis

Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord—Jesus recalls His earlier teaching (John 13:16, Matthew 10:24) using doulos (slave/servant) and kyrios (lord/master). The principle establishes hierarchy and shared experience: slaves cannot expect treatment superior to their master. This isn't abstract theology but practical preparation for persecution.

If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you (εἰ ἐμὲ ἐδίωξαν, καὶ ὑμᾶς διώξουσιν/ei eme ediōxan, kai hymas diōxousin)—the conditional assumes reality: they DID persecute Jesus (throughout His ministry—attempts to stone Him, drive Him from towns, now culminating in crucifixion), therefore they WILL persecute disciples. The verb diōkō means to pursue, chase, harass, drive away—systematic hostility, not mere disagreement.

If they have kept my saying, they will keep your's also (εἰ τὸν λόγον μου ἐτήρησαν, καὶ τὸν ὑμέτερον τηρήσουσιν/ei ton logon mou etērēsan, kai ton hymeteron tērēsousin)—the verb tēreō means to guard, observe, keep. Jesus acknowledges that those who received His teaching will receive the apostles' teaching. This promise encouraged first-century missionaries: genuine seekers who believed Christ would believe apostolic testimony.

The verse balances realism and hope: expect persecution like your Master

suffered, but also expect receptivity where Christ was received. The same message that divides will also save.

Historical Context

Jesus spoke this hours before His arrest. The disciples needed preparation for imminent trauma—their Master's crucifixion—and subsequent opposition. Within weeks, they faced the Sanhedrin's threats (Acts 4:1-22, 5:17-42). Within years, systematic persecution scattered the church (Acts 8:1-4) and martyred leaders like Stephen and James.

The principle "servant not greater than lord" appears across Jesus' teaching because disciples struggled with ambition and status-seeking (Matthew 18:1-4, 20:20-28, Luke 22:24-27). Here it reframes suffering: persecution isn't divine abandonment but shared experience with Christ. Paul later develops this: "that I may know him, and the fellowship of his sufferings" (Philippians 3:10).

The balanced prediction (some persecute, some receive) proved true throughout church history. Same apostolic preaching produced both martyrdom and mass conversions. Same Reformation gospel sparked both Inquisition burnings and Continental awakenings.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does viewing persecution as sharing Christ's experience rather than divine punishment transform your response to suffering?

2. What forms does "persecution" take in contemporary Western contexts versus openly hostile cultures?
3. How can the promise that some "will keep your saying" encourage faithful witness in the face of opposition?

Interlinear Text

μνημονεύετε τοῦ λόγον οὐ ἔγὼ εἶπον ὑμῖν Οὐκ

Remember G3588 **saying** G3056 **that** G3739 **I** G1473 **said** G2036 **unto you** G5213 **not** G3756

εἶστιν δοῦλος μείζων τοῦ κυρίου αὐτοῦ εἰ ἐμὲ

is G2076 **The servant** G1401 **greater than** G3187 **lord** G2962 **If** G1487 **me** G1691

διώξουσιν· καὶ ὑμᾶς διώξουσιν· εἰ τὸν λόγον μου

persecute G1377 **also** G2532 **you** G5209 **persecute** G1377 **If** G3588 **saying** G3056 **my** G3450

τηρήσουσιν καὶ τὸν ὑμέτερον τηρήσουσιν

they have kept G5083 **also** G2532 **yours** G5212 **they have kept** G5083

Additional Cross-References

2 Timothy 3:12 (Parallel theme): Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

John 13:16 (References Lord): Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him.

Matthew 10:24 (References Lord): The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord.

Ezekiel 3:7 (Parallel theme): But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me: for all the house of Israel are impudent and hardhearted.

1 Corinthians 4:12 (Parallel theme): And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it:

2 Corinthians 4:9 (Parallel theme): Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;

John 8:51 (Parallel theme): Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.

John 10:31 (Parallel theme): Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him.

1 Thessalonians 2:15 (References Lord): Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men:

Luke 6:40 (Parallel theme): The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master.

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