

## If the World Hates You

Text: John 15:18-16:4

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Scr. Reading: John 15:18-16:4

**BELIEVE! The Gospel of John**

One of the most important and powerful teachings of the Bible is “union with Christ”—the relationship of mutual indwelling between Jesus and the believer. It’s the doctrine Jesus has in mind in John 15 when He says: “I am the Vine and you are the branches. Abide in me and I in you” (vv4-5). He’s describing the subjective experience of union with Christ.

Union with Christ appears all through the NT (“in Christ,” “Christ in you,” “with Christ”), and it guarantees us some incredible benefits—regeneration, justification, adoption, sanctification, and many more. But **it also entails some costs**. Some unavoidable sacrifices Christians have to make simply because they are associated with Jesus.

Toward the end of *The Lord of the Rings*, the four hobbits (Sam, Frodo, Merry, Pippin) return to their homeland of the Shire after saving Middle Earth from evil and protecting the Shire from destruction. They’re heroes, and all the best citizens of Middle Earth realize it. ...except in the Shire where the other hobbits are suspicious and wary. There’s a scene in *The Return of the King* movie where an older hobbit sneers as these four ride past. They’ve been so eager to return to their homeland, but suddenly they realize they don’t quite fit there anymore. They still love their home, but they’ve grown and their relationship with the Shire has become complex. A new greatness has come into their lives, changing them. Sam, the simple gardener, becomes Mayor because they can now lead in ways better than they ever could before, but they are never fully understood. They still love and serve their old homeland, but they aren’t completely comfortable there anymore. (credit to T. Keller for this illustration)

Jesus says this is what happens to Christians—**a new greatness, i.e., the life of the Vine has come into their lives and changed them**. They still love their old homeland. They are able to serve and lead and love even better than before. But they just don’t quite fit anymore, and it makes the world very suspicious. In fact, the close connection between Jesus and Christians causes more than suspicion; it provokes outright hatred:

**v18** *If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.* Jesus says, “Your connection with me is going to place you in opposition

to the world, and that opposition will be costly.” Note the close connection between Jesus and His followers in vv18-21:

**vv18-21** *“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.<sup>19</sup> If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.<sup>20</sup> Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.<sup>21</sup> But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.*

In other words, if you are a Christian people might hate you for no reason at all other than your association with Jesus:

**1 Peter 4:14, 16** *If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.<sup>16</sup> Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.*

**The name of Jesus is the point of their hostility.** In the early days of Christianity under the Roman Empire, some rulers would put Christians to death *knowing they were innocent* of any crime but *simply because they admitted they were loyal to the name of Jesus*. It’s precisely what Jesus is predicting here in this text.

NOTE: A word about my prayers/desires for you in this sermon:

- Openness – a willingness to accept the word of God as it is, believe it, and obey it. This is an extremely difficult message to hear: the guarantee of opposition and suffering. But Jesus said it because He believes His followers would need to hear it (16:1) and I trust His judgment.
- Balance – A text like this could foster unhealthy suspicion or even fear of the world. But this isn’t the only thing Jesus says about the world. “Lift up your eyes – the fields are white unto harvest” (4:35). “God loved the world” (3:16); so should you!
- Courage – “In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (16:33). My prayer is that God will use this text to fill our church with bold evangelists who have counted the cost, know there will be opposition, and speak up for Jesus anyway.

Jesus addresses three questions:

1. Why the world hates you
2. How to respond to the world's hatred
3. What is at stake in your response

## WHY the world hates you

Jesus explains two reasons that distinguish every believer from every citizen of the world:

1. Christians are not of the world.

**v19** *If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.*

Being religious is not the problem—religious people are everywhere, and the world doesn't hate them. It isn't even being zealous or dogmatic about your faith—the world tolerates all kinds of religious commitment. They might think that level of fanaticism is weird or even fear it, but Christians incite their actual hatred. Why? Because Christians are not “of the world.” ***Their true home is in another country, and their heart and loyalty lie there.***

Notice that term “its own” in the second clause: “the world would love you as its own.” If the world felt you were one of theirs, they would love you. He's talking about your basic identity. ***Christians get their identity first and foremost from their connection to Jesus of Nazareth.*** As a result, they don't “belong” to their political party, their race, their gender, or any other identity group the same way the world does. Jesus says, “I am the Vine. You are rooted in Me, not your gender, your race, or your political party. You no longer get your identity there.” If the world felt you were one of theirs, they would love you. But you aren't, so they don't.

But there's more here than identity that makes them suspicious. There's grace. Jesus says, “You are not of the world but I chose you out of it.” Christians do not belong to the world, not because they never belonged, but because Jesus has personally and preferentially chosen them out of it. That kind of grace creates alienation.

The world runs on merit, entitlement, getting what you deserve just because you are worthy. Christianity doesn't work that way. That's why the world doesn't mind religion but it hates Christianity. Religion says, “I'm accepted because I meet the standards.” Christianity is precisely the opposite. Christianity says, “I strive to meet the standards because I am accepted.” The world is very comfortable around religion because every single person in the world is religious at heart.

If you are religious—working hard, proving your worth, doing all the right things, keeping the standards—the world might think you're weird but they won't hate you. But if you say, “Yes, I'm a complete mess but my future is incredibly bright because of Jesus, and I didn't do anything to deserve this”—the world will not understand you at all.

Jesus names a second reason the world hates you:

2. They do not know God (vv21-25)

**v21** *But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.*

This harsh response to you turns, not on who you are, but on who Jesus is. He is the one they despise because they do not know God. ...although they *should* know God because of the words and works of Jesus:

**vv22-25** *If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. <sup>23</sup> Whoever hates me hates my Father also. <sup>24</sup> If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. <sup>25</sup> But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: 'They hated me without a cause.'*

The crowds in Jesus' day had no excuse for their ignorance. Jesus says if He had not spoken to them, “they would not have been guilty of sin”—that specific sin of not knowing God. Jesus' words (v22) and works (v24) revealed the Father, but they didn't receive either one. Why not? No good reason (v25). As prophesied, “they hated Him without cause.”

There is no just cause for the world's hatred of Jesus; but there is a reason. Jesus Himself named it earlier:

**7:7** [Jesus, to his brothers] *The world cannot hate you, but it hates me*

*because I testify about it that its works are evil.*

It isn't just religious people who are uncomfortable with Christianity. Rebels hate it, too. The world does not like its autonomy being challenged. Jesus spoke with authority, an authority from outside the world, the authority of God Himself that judges the world. The people of His day hated that:

**3:19** *This is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil.*

It isn't just our postmodern world that despises the claim to have absolute truth. The people in Jesus' day hated it, too. They did not want anything to do with someone who claimed an authority that could judge their own personal experience.

See, Jesus didn't just provide a remedy for sin; first, He exposed it. He didn't just offer grace; He showed why we all need grace. He incited the religious and the rebel. See, friends, it doesn't matter which way you go. If you are a Christian, they will hate you either way. That's because their hatred is about God, not you.

## HOW to respond

1. Accept that it's going to be this way.

Notice how often Jesus says: "Know this. Remember this. Accept this."

**v18** *If the world hates you, know that it has hated me first...*

**v20** *Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.*

**16:4** *I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you.*

If you don't understand this, you are going to be continually shocked, surprised, confused and eventually defeated. Just make peace with this fact: the world will not make peace with you.

**1 Peter 4:12** *Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.*

**2 Timothy 3:12** *Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted...*

Voice of the Martyrs tells us that there have been more Christians killed in last 100 years than in previous 1900 years of church history

combined. We Americans are living in a bubble. Thank God for our liberty and our society's tolerance. But we need to stop being surprised even as Americans when we encounter hostility. ***If what Jesus says here is true, the real surprise should be that more of us haven't died:***

**16:2-3** *They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. <sup>3</sup> And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me.*

2. Keep testifying about Jesus.

Jesus mentions the Holy Spirit in verse 26—the "Helper" whose primary mission was to have no new mission of His own. The role of the Helper was simply to continue the ministry of Jesus through His followers. How did Jesus respond when He encountered hostility? He kept testifying.

That's what the Holy Spirit is coming to do:

**v26** *But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.*

And that's what we must continue to do:

**v27** *And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.*

Jesus is saying, "The Spirit, through you, will bear witness about me." That's how the world links you to Jesus. As long as you keep your mouth shut, they'll tolerate you. It's when you start to testify of Jesus that all their animosity and hatred toward God comes out.

Friends, let me give you three practical encouragements to embolden you and strengthen your determination to witness:

- The gospel is a GREAT message! The gospel confirms the sense that we are not what we should be, but it answers to our greatest hopes that we can be accepted anyway. It says, "Yes, those whispers you hear inside are correct; you are guilty. But full forgiveness, a clean conscience, and peace with your King can be yours... for free! ***God's wrath against you was fully spent, not withheld, but on His Son instead of upon you.***"
- You have the authority and power of the Godhead at work behind your own witness. You are not bearing witness alone. The Spirit bears witness to Jesus, too (v26).
- We suburban Americans are in a special situation—comfortable, still

some measure of respect. It's not going to get much easier than this. If you won't bear witness to the Lord Jesus now, in spite of the (small) hostility against you, when will you do it?

**[my own story: 1. learn apologetics, 2. schedule evangelism like any other priority – for me, the Parker PD]**

## WHAT is at stake

Why is Jesus sharing this?

**vv1-4** *I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. <sup>2</sup> They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. <sup>3</sup> And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. <sup>4</sup> But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you. I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you.*

If you don't expect hostility, you could be so offended, so hurt, and so ashamed, that ultimately you fall away from your faith altogether. In fact, Jesus says the greatest danger is not their ridicule. It's not even their violent opposition. The real danger is that you might deny Jesus and lose your soul:

**Matthew 10:28-33** *And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. <sup>29</sup> Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. <sup>30</sup> But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. <sup>31</sup> Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. <sup>32</sup> So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, <sup>33</sup> but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.*

What if we don't testify? What if we distance ourselves from Jesus by being silent, blending in, acting like we are citizens of earth just like them instead of citizens of heaven? What if the pressure is too much and fear takes over?

If we are not sharing the gospel, we are not acting like Jesus. Pursue relationship with unconverted people. Study apologetics. Pray for opportunities. Schedule it as you would any other priority. Cultivate joy in the gospel and love for people. All these will help. But ultimately we

just have to decide to "cross the pain line" and do it.

Christian friend, following Jesus costs something—maybe even your life. But consider the other option—to side against God? against His Son who died for you in love?

CONCL. Years ago Michael Card told a story about a Maasai warrior named Joseph who was just walking along a trail near his village when he met a Christian evangelist who told him about Jesus and shared the gospel with him. Amazed by that love and grace, Joseph immediately repented of his sins and trusted Christ. As soon as he came to his village, he went door-to-door telling everyone about the cross and the salvation he had found there. His people not only mocked and rejected his message, but they became violent as well—men held him down as women whipped him with strands of barbed wire. Left for dead, somehow he survived and dragged himself to water. After several days of passing in and out of consciousness, he regained strength. But he was perplexed by the hostile reception he received from the people and decided he must have left something out of this great story about Jesus. So he went back to share his faith again. Same reaction, same result—they dragged his unconscious body from the village and left him to die. Several days later, Joseph awoke, bloody, bruised, scarred...and determined to go back yet again—pleading with them to accept the love of Christ. Same reaction... but this time, before he passed out, he saw was the women beating him had begun to weep. He awoke in his own bed. The entire village had become Christians because of Joseph's willingness to suffer on their behalf. <http://www.itслиkethis.org/the-witnessing-warrior/>

They saw a greatness from another world had come into his life, and it won them.

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