

The Cost of Following Christ

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[0 : 00] All right, well we are continuing on through the Gospel of John. So if you have your Bible with you, you can open it up to the Gospel of John, chapter 15. It's the night of Jesus' betrayal.

Jesus is now with the eleven disciples. Judas has left to put the plan into motion. This is before they go into the Garden of Gethsemane. And Jesus is continuing to encourage and comfort and teach these eleven men.

And this whole chapter is just Jesus speaking to them. It's his words to them. We're picking it up this morning in John, chapter 15, verse 18. Jesus says to them, If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.

If you belong 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 what I told you.

[1 : 16] A servant is not 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. Much of what Jesus has to say at this point in the evening is rather sobering.

These first words of verse 18 really set the tone for this section. If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. We've been hearing Jesus talk about our relationship with him.

Vine and branches and fruit. And love and joy. But now the subject changes and the tone gets serious. Jesus is beginning to prepare these men for what's coming.

The world will hate you, says Jesus. There's going to be hatred, animosity, opposition, and yes, even persecution coming your way.

[2 : 29] Things are going to get nasty. But as Jesus tells them this, there's some comfort in his words as well. And it's not that kind of empty, feel-good assurance.

Don't worry, everything's going to be all right. Instead, Jesus gives the kind of comfort, I'm going to call them anchoring truths. Or guiding lights.

Because when things get difficult, when the storms of life hit, we sometimes find ourselves disoriented. Wondering which way's up, which way's down.

Searching for answers. Trying to understand what's going on and why. Why is this happening? And in those moments, we need something to really anchor onto and get our bearings.

We need a guiding light, a fixed point in the midst of the darkness. And that's the kind of comfort Jesus offers them here. The world will hate you, says Jesus.

[3 : 33] But there is a reason. And understanding those reasons will help you through it. So Jesus gives his disciples at least three reasons why the world will hate them.

Reason number one, he says, the world will hate you because you do not belong to the world anymore. Verse 19. If you belong 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. The world here generally means the people of the world.

And Jesus makes it clear that each of the disciples themselves were, at one time, part of the world. Jesus says, I have chosen you out of the world.

Meaning, you used to be part of it. But now Jesus does an interesting thing. He seems to kind of draw a line in the sand between them, the disciples, and the world.

[4 : 42] He sort of creates two groups here. He says to the disciples, if you were literally of the world, if you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own.

But I have now chosen you out of the world. To put it in our way of saying things, the world will hate you because you are no longer one of them.

And we can talk about that word hate. Hate in our English language, it's a very strong word. It's like the strongest form of dislike.

But it can also include everything below it, too. It can include disdain. It can include dislike. It can include people that would insult you.

I mean, all of that's kind of lumped in under there. The world will hate you, says Jesus, because you are no longer one of them. And this is quite the statement.

[5 : 47] Jesus has come into this world, and there is this separation taking place here. There are now the followers of Jesus, and there is the world.

And Jesus seems to be suggesting you can be either one or the other. This kind of hinges on whether or not you accept Jesus and are going to follow him or not.

And probably Jesus uses the world to describe those who are not his followers, because it's the majority, really, who do not receive Jesus or who are opposed to Jesus.

So it's as if he's saying, you can belong to the world and be one of them, or you can belong to me and be one of mine. And you, my disciples, now that you are no longer one of them, one of the world, you are mine.

For I have chosen you out of the world. And that is why the world hates you, disdains you, despises you, does not love you.

[7 : 00] Jesus lays it plainly before them and before us. There is a cost to following him. It will include a change in your allegiance, a change in sides, a change in who you would call your people.

You, my disciples, are about to realize, if you haven't already, that you're no longer one of them, says Jesus.

Not like you used to be. And that's why the world hates you. Following Jesus requires a change in your very identity, a change in your camp, your tribe, your people.

And that separation is at the heart of this opposition, this hatred, this treating you with contempt, says Jesus.

So that's the first reason that Jesus gives. The world will hate you because you do not belong to it anymore. The second reason Jesus gives, he says, the world will hate you because it hates me.

[8 : 07] We see this in verse 18. If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. And verse 20.

Remember what I told you, a servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. They will treat you this way because of my name.

So there is a deeper reason why the world will hate, despise, disdain Jesus' followers. And it's not just because they're different. Not just because they're separate and weird and, well, I don't like that about them.

No. At the root of their contempt is me, says Jesus. They will have a problem with you because they have a problem with me.

Look at how this story has gone so far. Many have come to hate Jesus so fiercely up to this point in the story as he's been going about and doing things and teaching.

[9 : 17] In fact, tomorrow, the crowd will be shouting, Crucify him! Kill him on a cross! And so Jesus levels with them.

Peter, James, Nathaniel. This is to be expected. If that's how they've been treating me, they're going to treat you in the same way.

Because you are my followers. If they hate the master, they will hate his servants as well. For the servants have pledged themselves to the master's service.

If they hate the leader, they will hate his devoted followers too, says Jesus. And again, we're seeing this truth come out that there's a cost to following Jesus.

Many people despised him. And so Jesus says, That contempt that they have for me, it's coming your way. The world will hate you because it hates me.

[10 : 25] The third reason Jesus gives for why the world will hate his disciples is this.

The world will hate you because it does not know God. We see this here in verse 21. They will treat you this way because of my name for they do not know the one who sent me.

This is an even deeper reason for why people reject and hate Jesus and by extension his followers. Jesus says it's because they don't know God.

Now this might sound a little strange to our ears. We might think, huh? Which comes first? Knowing God? Or accepting Jesus?

Believing in Jesus? And we can easily get all tied up with this thing that Jesus said. And I'll admit it to you. I probably don't have the authoritative final word on how this works and what this means.

[11 : 30] But here's a few thoughts. First of all, we have to watch that word, know. What does Jesus mean when he says, they did not know God?

One of the threads that runs through the Bible is that to know someone, often it means more than just to know about them. A very literal translation of Genesis chapter 4 verse 1.

I'm looking back at the old King James. Now Adam knew Eve, his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain. So knowing a person, at least in the Bible, often refers to having a significant relationship with them, even an intimate relationship with them.

We see this clearly again in John 17.3 where Jesus is praying and he says to the Father, now this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God.

So I don't think Jesus means to say that the world hates him because it's just unaware of who sent him. This hatred towards Jesus is not born out of ignorance.

[12 : 46] It's not that they don't know that God sent Jesus. And so, oops, we made an honest mistake. Jesus will make this even clearer in a minute when we get to the next section.

Rather, Jesus seems to be suggesting that they do not have a relationship with God as they ought to, as they should, leading up to this and Jesus coming and speaking to them.

And that's why they hate his son. There were some in Israel who knew God even before Jesus came. There was Zachariah and Elizabeth.

There was Mary and Joseph. There was Anna and Simeon. All these were people who had real faith in Yahweh, the God of Israel.

And there were a good number of people who also heard the words of John the Baptizer out in the wilderness. He was calling the people to repent, to turn back to God.

[13 : 48] And some of them responded and they did. They believed. They were baptized. And then later, they went on to follow Jesus as John pointed them to him. These were the people who knew God.

They had a relationship with God based on faith. Just like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, King David. and so now that Jesus has come, these people that knew God, they recognized him.

They believed him. They loved him. After all, Jesus, as John has told us in this gospel, was God who had come down and taken on human flesh and lived among us.

But the world, the majority, many of them, they weren't all too concerned about God. Even before John was baptizing in the wilderness, the sense we get from the scriptures is that the Pharisees and religious leaders, some of them, they were wicked hypocrites all along.

They didn't love God. They were corrupt and self-interested. They were going through the religious motions to benefit themselves. They loved the praise of other people.

[15 : 12] They craved power. They loved money. And so when John came preaching, they laughed at him. They rejected him.

They made fun of him. And then when Jesus came on the scene, they rejected him also. They already had a certain posture of the heart towards God.

They did not know God. They did not have that relationship with him. And as we'll see in a moment, they didn't want to know God. Through this lens, I think it makes a little more sense, doesn't it?

This is why they hated Jesus. Because Jesus is the embodiment of God. The same God that they've been ignoring and snubbing and pushing off all along.

And now here's Jesus more and more exposing the truth about the kind of people that they are. About their wickedness and corruption. He's putting the spotlight on their sins and they're not repenting.

[16 : 21] They're stubborn. Instead, they want to get rid of Jesus. They want to kill him. They hated Jesus. And Jesus says, they will hate you also.

They will persecute you also. For the same reason, because they do not know God. So these are three reasons Jesus gives to why the world will hate you.

Why the world will persecute you. They will hate you because you are not one of them anymore. They will hate you because they hate me. And they will hate you because you do not know, they do not know God.

And as we'll see, they do not want to know God. Now we come to the second section here, verses 22 to 25. And Jesus now shifts away from the world hating his disciples to talk now about his relationship to the world.

We'll hear a little more about how the world has hated Jesus. And Jesus makes it clear that God will hold them guilty for how they have treated him.

[17 : 39] Let's read it in verse 22. 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. But this is to fulfill what is written in their law.

They hated me without reason. Let's start here in verse 22. 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. Now, I know that this raises some major questions for some of us. But, let's start with what's clear.

[18 : 43] What is clear that Jesus is saying here? If I had not come and spoken to them, but I have. I have come.

I have spoken to them. And they have not listened. They have rejected. And so, now they have no excuse for their sin. They are guilty for their sin.

That's what's clear here that Jesus is saying. Now, I know what some of us are wondering and thinking. We're wondering, is Jesus saying that we wouldn't be guilty for our sins if he'd never come?

And if you just read it just like that all by itself, I know that you could come to that idea. But I don't think Jesus means to say that we would all get a free pass to heaven if Jesus had never come.

This is where we have to take care to listen to the whole Bible and what Jesus has said all throughout the story, all throughout the Gospels about human sin and guilt.

[19 : 48] And it's absolutely clear throughout all the scriptures that we all are guilty of our sins. We stand guilty before God and we deserve his punishment, his just punishment.

if Jesus hadn't come, the message from everywhere else in the Bible is that we would all have perished.

And so what does Jesus mean here when he says if I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin? Well, I'll give you the short answer, I don't know.

But my best guess here is that Jesus is referring to a very specific sin. Not that they wouldn't be guilty of any sins that they've committed, but that they would not be guilty of the very specific sin of how they have been responding to God since he has come and treated him.

A grievous thing for which they are left with absolutely no excuse before God. This is a big perhaps, perhaps, but had Jesus not yet come, there is perhaps an objection that could be raised, a measure of ignorance that could be pleaded for why God should forgive them and be merciful, a sort of desperate plea perhaps that the judge make absolutely clear what we're convicted of and give us one last opportunity to repent before he passes the final sentence and hand us over to judgment.

[21 : 26] perhaps, that's my best guess, but the main point of Jesus is not so much what would be or could be, but what is. He says, I have come and I have spoken to them and they have rejected me and are treating me this way, so be sure they will be held guilty before my father for their sins.

they will have no excuse. It's as though Jesus is saying, I am that final, gracious, and merciful opportunity and they have spurned me and rejected me.

With the coming of Jesus, no one who has heard what he has to say can plead ignorance. Jesus has made it clear what we must do to be restored to God and have his forgiveness and be in his kingdom.

And so Jesus, I think, is acknowledging, yes, the world will hate you and yes, the world hates me and God will hold the people of the world guilty for this.

There is no pleading ignorance because I have left them with no excuse, says Jesus. I have come, I have spoken to them and they have spurned and rejected and hated me.

[22 : 56] And then Jesus makes this incredible statement that, wow, verse 23, he says, whoever hates me hates my father as well.

There is no wiggle room here. There is no option to say, well, I love God, I love the father but I don't like Jesus. I don't want to have anything to do with him.

I don't want to listen to him or do what he says. No, we can't make that excuse. It doesn't work. Jesus leaves us no wiggle room.

And if we even try it, we misunderstand who Jesus is. He's not just a man. Jesus has been claiming to be one with the father.

I and the father are one, said Jesus. I am in him, he is in me. As we mentioned earlier, right at the beginning of the gospel of John, he said that Jesus is the word who was God and became flesh and lived among us.

[24 : 03] And so this here is the creator. This is Yahweh in human flesh walking among us. And so there's no option to love God and hate Jesus.

it can't be done. If you hate me, says Jesus, you hate my father also as well. What is Jesus doing here?

He seems to be stripping away all of our excuses. Now that he's come, if we do not accept him for who he is and listen to the things he has said, then there will be no hope for us on that final day.

our verdict will continue to be guilty. Jesus then goes on here in verse 24 to strip away one final excuse.

He says, 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.

[25 : 14] father. But this is to fulfill what is written in their law. They hated me without reason. These are sobering words.

We might wonder sometimes, but what if they just honestly misunderstood and didn't just ended up on the wrong side of things and didn't see that Jesus was really the son of God?

What if they just made a mistake? What if they were trying to protect God's name from blasphemy and they just ended up accidentally, innocently, on the wrong side, condemning this man, Jesus?

Well, Jesus strips away any chance for honest misunderstanding with these words. 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. Jesus did countless signs and miracles, acts of divine power that are impossible for any mere man to do.

[26 : 20] And they are the confirmation from God. They are the evidence that Jesus really is the son of God, the Messiah. It's not as though God has left it open to misunderstanding.

The miracles were so utterly undeniable. We've seen this as we went along. Even Jesus' fiercest opponents couldn't deny the things that he was doing.

They didn't know what to do with the people that were there healed right in front of their faces. They couldn't deny it. They admitted it. And let's remember the kinds of miracles and signs Jesus was doing.

We're talking acts of compassion. Healing the sick, the lame, blind, the deaf, people with diseases, freeing people from demon possession, feeding the masses food when they were hungry, all wonderful things, all good things.

And Jesus says, the world has seen those things and yet they have hated me, both me and my father.

[27 : 33] And so there's no excuse, says Jesus. they will be held guilty for their sins against me. And then he quotes a psalm of David.

And the gist of his point there I think is to say something like this. Just like there were wicked people in King David's day who hated him without reason, unjustifiably for no fault of David's in the same way.

That's what's happening now in an even greater sense. in an ultimate sense. I am God's anointed chosen king for his people and they are totally unjustified in their treatment of me.

God will hold guilty all who spurn and hate and reject Jesus and God will hold guilty all who do the same to his beloved followers.

Now this is not the end of the comfort that Jesus is bringing he's going to say more in the sections ahead to lift their spirits and to encourage them and to fill them with joy and hope as they face what's coming.

[28 : 45] But we're nearly out of time for this morning so we're going to pick this conversation up again next Sunday. But I want to take a couple minutes here to just apply what we've heard so far.

Sometimes it might be difficult to know what to do with these words of Jesus. We tend to read these words as if Jesus is speaking directly to us. But I want to encourage you.

We do well here to think first of how these words applied to the eleven men that Jesus is with that night. What are they about to go through here?

Think about it. They're about to watch Jesus be ripped away from them, ridiculed, mocked, falsely accused, slandered, beaten brutally, and violently put to death.

These are going to be some of the hardest days of their lives. Days in which they're going to be wondering which way's up and which way's down and what's just happened here.

[29 : 59] And now here we are in the midst of all this. Jesus, most well-known disciples, most loyal, devoted followers, and they've hated him so much that they killed him.

Are we next? What's going to happen to us? What do we do? That's why Jesus has given these words. First and foremost, they're to the eleven men with him that night.

he's telling them in advance what will happen. Yes, they will hate you. And he's telling them why. Because you're not one of them anymore.

They will hate you because you are a follower of me and they hate me. That's the underlying reason. And they will hate you, my followers, for they do not know God.

But because I have come and spoken to them and done the signs and miracles I did among them, they are without excuse and they will be held guilty for the rejection and persecution of me and for their hatred and persecution of you.

[31 : 17] I think we need to pause and just appreciate how these words would have been helpful to the eleven men with Jesus that night. Yes, there is a measure in which these words are for all of us, all followers of Jesus, you and me, but probably these eleven men had it far worse than most followers of Christ ever did in the centuries that followed.

These men became the pillars of the church of Jesus Christ, Paul's words, not mine. They had bigger targets on their backs than most would ever have because they were the eyewitnesses of Jesus.

And so many of them were brutally persecuted and killed as well. Now it is true, there have been Christians all through the centuries who have suffered and been killed because of their faith in Jesus' name.

And I think these words are for them too, in a special way. Those who are suffering, those who have suffered, I know these words are probably very precious.

But for us here in this room today, these truths, let's be honest, they probably hit us a little differently. Some of us might even say, well I've never really been hated because I'm a Christian.

[32 : 50] And if that's you, praise God. Isn't that wonderful? If we have freedom to worship Jesus and openly claim the name of Christ for a season in a certain place of the world and nobody is upset with us or after us, that's a good thing.

That's a gift of God. In fact, Paul even encouraged us to pray and ask for that in 1 Timothy 2, verse 1 to 3. But maybe there are some of you here this morning who have experienced some kind of resentment or disdain or poor treatment from someone because of your faith in Jesus.

Maybe you've got the cold shoulder at work or someone has made fun of your faith or mocked you or insulted you or just been unkind to you. And if that's happened to you, then yes, I believe that these words are for you.

They are for all of us for when those times of opposition and mistreatment come because of our faith in Jesus. Jesus wants you too to be able to get your bearings in the midst of that when those feelings are welling up inside of you and you're on the defensive feeling what is going on here.

There are reasons why we come under fire, why we are treated in this way. Number one, if you belong to Christ, you are not one of them anymore.

[34 : 26] Number two, their bad attitude or treatment of you may reflect not so much a problem with you, but a problem that they have with Jesus, the one that you identify with.

we might not know what's going on in their thoughts, in their minds, but perhaps every time they are reminded of Jesus, they feel convicted of the sins that they are hanging on to in their lives.

And then they see you, they bump into you, and you are that living, breathing reminder of where they stand before God, before Christ. Christ. And number three, if they treat you poorly and disdain you for being a Christian, we have to remember it's because they don't know God.

There is a spiritual reality that runs deeply here. There's an aversion to God bound up in the human heart because of sin. And so what should we do in those relationships with those people in our lives?

I want to encourage you this morning to have the same attitude that Jesus had. What did he pray while they were killing him on the cross?

[35 : 48] Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing. Yes, Jesus says that the persecutors are guilty of their sins.

He has come, He has spoken, He has done the miracles, and they have rejected Him. But God is so patient, so merciful. Yes, they are guilty, but even at this point in the story, the persecutors, it's not too late for them.

In fact, after Jesus is crucified and rises from the dead, He ascends to heaven, the Spirit comes down at Pentecost, Peter preaches his sermon in front of many of the Jews, probably some of them who witnessed the crucifixion of Jesus.

He says, let all Israel be assured of this. God has made this Jesus whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah. And when the people heard this, they were cut to the heart.

Many repented after and believed. They were forgiven and they were added to the number of Jesus' followers. Paul said this to Timothy, 2 Timothy 2.25, he said, opponents must be gently instructed in the hope that God will grant them repentance, leading them to a knowledge of the truth.

[37 : 18] Jesus said it this way, but I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. And then you will be sons, children of your Father in heaven who is gracious and kind and loving even to those who don't deserve it, both the righteous and the unrighteous.

There is at times a cost to following Jesus, especially when it comes to our relationships with other people in the world. But rest assured, no matter how badly we are treated, we belong to Christ Jesus, the King.

And there is nothing more valuable than that in this world. Let's pray. Father in heaven, we thank you for your word.

As we hear these things and reflect on your words, we especially turn our hearts' attention to those who are suffering intensely in our world today, in other places in the world, countries that are very difficult to be a Christian.

And we pray and ask that you would be gracious to them, that you would strengthen them, that you would encourage them in the face of the opposition that they are going through. We ask that you would help them to hold fast to the hope that you have given, the promises that you've made, and that they would even find that power inside of them to love.

[39 : 01] And to keep treating those who are doing these things with kindness. forgiveness. Lord, for us in our relationships, help us, help us not to give up on those who seem cold or who have said unkind things to us, but give us a fresh strength and love for each of those people in our lives.

May they know that we are Christians and that you are a God who loves them through us. We ask this in Jesus' name, for his glory. Amen.