

A World of Hate

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Preacher: Phil Meulman

[0 : 0 0] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 2nd of April 2000. The preacher is Phil Muleman.

His sermon is entitled A World of Hate and is from John chapter 15 verses 18 to 27. Let's pray.

Our Heavenly Father we thank you for your word. We thank you that it teaches us and inspires us. Lord I pray that we would be better equipped to be your servants as we hear from it this morning.

Amen. Well please be seated. In front of you are the Pew Bibles and you may like to open it to page 878. We've been preaching through John's Gospel here at Holy Trinity since Christmas time and we get up to these verses from chapter 15 today.

Verses 18 and so on. Give your life to Jesus. If you walk in obedience to him, all will be blessing.

[1 : 1 3] He'll take your problems and he'll fill your life with joy. All you have to do is surrender to him. Surrender to Jesus. Well is this really true?

Is this what it's like when you do become a Christian? No more worries. No more hassles. Is this just peace and joy and tranquility?

Life would be a lot easier if it were that way. But like many, I've had to learn the hard way that you cannot promise new Christians ease and blessing simply because they have put their trust in God.

That sort of opening statement I gave you I think is a distorted version of the truth. For some people find that when they become a Christian, they immediately encounter difficulties and trials.

Some people become Christians and are immediately mocked. They're rejected and they're persecuted. And there are certain sin patterns within people which make it more difficult for some than others to break lifelong habits and surrender them to Christ.

[2 : 3 2] It's not always easy when someone becomes a Christian. And if you don't know that from the very start, then as soon as a trial comes your way, you may begin to think that God has abandoned you, that he has left you to fend for yourself.

But just a little bit of an advance warning of the coming danger can help prepare Christians for the difficulties and the moral dilemmas that they must face within this life.

And here we see in this passage from John 15 that Jesus provides advance warning. And he provides quite a large measure of it here in this passage, which we'll see this morning.

Now Jesus is towards the end of his earthly ministry with his disciples. And he has called the eleven disciples aside because Judas Iscariot has gone to betray Jesus now.

He's called the eleven disciples aside and he has poured his life into theirs. He's told them everything that he can. And he's taught them all of these things because his death is imminent.

[3 : 44] And now here he is. He's alone with his disciples in the upper room on the last night of his life. He has taught them about the Holy Spirit, about his preparations for them and explained that they must abide or remain in him.

He will also pray for them. But now at this stage of teaching, he warns them that they are about to face opposition that one would not expect if not told in advance.

These disciples were perhaps a bit naive, if you like. They thought that if they merely followed this religious leader, their lives would be full and certainly that their discipleship would not become problematic.

But in contrast to their expectations, and this is something that we as Christians all need to know, the follower of Christ will face certain opposition from this world.

And Jesus wants his disciples to be prepared for that. That's why he speaks. And this is why he teaches. So let's have a look at what he says.

[4 : 59] First of all, in verse 18, Jesus tells them, If the world hated you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you.

Now Jesus exemplifies the best style of leadership at all times. He's like the proverbial commander who doesn't go into battle and ask his soldiers to do anything other than what he himself is willing to do.

The basis of Jesus' teaching is that he has first been rejected far longer and with more venom than the disciples his closest followers will ever face.

He understands firsthand what persecution is like. Just imagine for a moment, a hypothetical God who asked his followers to go out and suffer in the world when he never had.

Imagine a God who sits comfortably in heaven while demanding that his disciples suffered with their own sweat, their blood and tears. It doesn't seem right, does it?

[6 : 15] Well, that's not the kind of God Jesus is. Rather, he knows exactly what his co-sufferers will experience.

No Christian will ever, ever undergo suffering that Jesus, our captain, has not already been through. He doesn't hypothetically empathise with us.

He really knows the sting of opposition that we feel. He has the scars in his hands, in his feet and his side to prove it.

So know this. The next time you, as a Christian, suffer some opposition from this world, know this. If the world hates you, it hated Jesus first.

Now in this passage, we see a word which comes out quite strongly. It's the word hate. It's used here eight times. It's not the word dislike or not preferred, but rather the world bears a feeling of hostility toward Jesus and his followers that can only be described here as hatred.

[7 : 36] It's a very strong word. Have you ever experienced this kind of persecution because you are a Christian? Perhaps in our pluralistic society, this kind of persecution is not obvious.

But Jesus teaches here that opposition will come. Now I was searching on the internet this week and I found this letter, which was directed to a Christian, as an e-hate mail.

And it says this. Sirs, I'm glad to know where the religious Nazis of this country hang out on the internet. I am an atheist and proud of it.

Your religious agenda imposes your agenda on minorities like myself and other non-Christian denominations. Then again, Nazis like you like that. We shall fight you in the voting booths and in the streets if necessary.

And it's signed, Maccabee, whoever that is. Now I don't know the full context of this letter, but I do know that it's aimed at Christians. Well, why does the Christian gospel arouse such hatred in people?

[9 : 00] To answer that is another sermon in itself. But what I want to say to all Christians and to new and young Christians in particular, or those who are thinking about Christianity, is that those who are not Christians will not necessarily treat you with respect.

Be prepared for it. And don't let it knock the stuffing out of you when that persecution or that persecution comes your way. Don't let it do that to you.

Now why does Jesus claim that hatred and persecution is inevitable? He gives the reason in verse 19.

And the reason is because the world loves all those who are its own. Like, likes like, if you like. And the world tolerates all those who conform to its value system.

But the world here does not refer to the planet, but to the population of humanity that doesn't bow to the knee of God. That is, unsaved humanity in this world.

[10 : 08] He goes on, if you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Now as Christians, we should take these words seriously and see our identity as defined by these.

We do not belong to the world. So that means that our goals, our aspirations, our most important values, the use of our time, the application of our finances, the way we view human events, our priorities, the things that we accept and the things that we don't accept, our children, and all of these, all of the important things are different from the world.

Because we do not, as Christians, belong to this world. Sure, we live within it and we're here in it now, but we don't belong to this world.

We are passing through. We live in what is commonly called the now, the here and now, but the not yet. Heaven.

That is something that for all of us as Christians, we look forward to, where there will be peace, where there will be joy and tranquility, if you like. Now, can we honestly look at ourselves in the mirror and confess this?

[11 : 34] I do not belong to this world, but to Christ. Or has our worldview become so affected by those around us that as Christians, we hardly stand out as different.

You see, the Christian is chosen out of this world. We are elected, separated, distinguished from the rest of the world as the treasures of God's grace and favour.

And because we are chosen of this world, separated by God's choice and favour, Jesus goes on to say, therefore, the world hates you. And Jesus himself tells us the reason.

And we would do well to remember this often, daily, as we live here in this world. Now, Jesus goes on to give another reason why the disciples will suffer opposition.

He goes on and says, in verse 20, servants are not greater than their master. Now, they're familiar words to these disciples.

[12 : 44] They've heard them all before and we've heard them here just a couple of chapters prior in chapter 13. He has said exactly the same words. Servants are not greater than their master.

And when he said it back in chapter 13, he said it there in the context of service. And now he says the same words here. Servants are not greater than their master in the context of persecution.

He goes on and he says, if they persecuted me, they will persecute you. Jesus was these disciples' teacher.

And the nature of servanthood in chapter 13 was in service. And again, the nature of servanthood here will also be seen in persecution. And he taught his disciples on the job.

He showed them the way to go. And they were prepared by watching him and by living with him. So they should not expect any better treatment than he received.

[13 : 49] Now, our Western world teaches us that things should get better or easier as time goes by, doesn't it? That it goes on and says that we should work towards making our lives as comfortable as possible.

For example, we put away our nest egg for retirement. Now, that's not necessarily a bad thing in itself. But as Christians, that is not our goal.

Our retirement is not our goal. Our goal is to follow Christ and to serve him and to look forward to that day when we get that heavenly prize.

Now, sometimes, as we serve Christ, this may lead us into difficulty and hardship just as Jesus himself experienced.

Now, there's also a flip side here in verse 20. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. And what Jesus is saying is that the disciples can expect just about the same kind of reception that was given to Jesus.

[14 : 54] No better, no worse. if people hated Jesus, they will hate Christians. If they loved and obeyed Jesus, they will love and obey Christians as well.

And verse 21 tells us why. They will do all these things to you on account of my name, Jesus' name, because they do not know him who sent me.

Now, verses 22 and verse 24, Jesus makes two claims that seem to indicate that for some it is worse, not better, that he came into the world.

In verse 22 he says, If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sinned. Now, on the surface, it seems to be saying that if Jesus did not come, some people would have gotten off scot-free.

You know, there wouldn't be any hassles or anything to worry about. Now, to help us understand this verse, I think we need to use a little bit of common sense and also other parts of the Bible to help us make sense of it.

[16 : 07] Jesus nowhere in the Bible states or implies that people are sinless. In fact, throughout the Bible, the sinful condition of people seems to be one of the dominant themes which goes on in the Bible.

Now, just one verse in the Bible which many of us might know well from the book of Romans, tells us that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

There is no one, you or me, who does not sin. And Jesus doesn't contradict this. Yet, when Jesus came, when he was God in the flesh, and taught so clearly, one of the results is that people were more clearly guilty after his earthly presence.

And now that he has come, he goes on and says, they have no excuse for their sin. Similarly, in verse 24, Jesus says, if I had not done among them the works, speaking about his miracles that no one else did, they would not have sinned.

But now they have seen and hated both me and my father. Again, it's not the case that people are without guilt or sin if they had not seen Jesus' works or miracles.

[17 : 32] They are still guilty regardless. Yet, after Jesus' appearance and his amazing ministry where he performed many miracles and so on, it is even less excusable.

Jesus worked astounding miracles. They were undeniable. They were clear and very, very effective. But even after all the works and miracles that he performed, many still did not believe in him.

And those who did not believe after such clear demonstrations, were more blameworthy. And if Jesus had not made it so clear, one might have been a little more understanding of them.

But not after all the miracles that he also performed in front of their very eyes. And this is a clear warning then for those who say they believe in Jesus but do not follow his teachings.

Jesus also notes in verse 23 whoever hates me hates my father also.

[18 : 44] One person says this, he writes this, the Jews were in the habit of thinking that they could claim God as father while at the same time regarding Jesus as demon possessed.

They claimed that they loved the father though they evidently hated the son. But in view of the fact that the father and the son are one in essence, such an attitude is impossible.

It's impossible to love God and not the son. Love the father and not the son. A person may imagine that he loves the father while he hates the son but he deceives himself.

Whoever hates the one hates the other also. And this holds also with respect to the present day and age.

People who scoff and laugh at the death of Jesus do not love God. You cannot love the father and hate the son.

[19 : 49] It doesn't work. So the next time you meet someone who says that they believe in God the father but not Jesus. Think of this verse here.

Verse 23 and ask who is correct? The person who is saying this or what the Bible says? You cannot be a follower of God if you do not love Jesus.

Now Jesus goes on and quotes from the Psalms saying they hated me without a cause. In essence to show that all along it had been expected that he would be hated for no reason.

He knew what was going to come his way so he wasn't surprised when he met opposition. In fact he was prepared for it and he continued to serve God even when other people hated him.

Can we do any less? Here he is preparing us for the same thing. Well what I'm saying is all pretty glum isn't it?

[20 : 54] As Christians we will be persecuted and there will be people who hate us because we love Jesus and worship him. But friends there is hope.

We see in verse 26 that we will be sustained and able to testify on Jesus' behalf because of the promise he makes to us of the coming one of the advocate as it says here or the Holy Spirit who is to come.

Jesus is not going to abandon his followers and so on but he is there to comfort them and he is there to comfort them with the good news of the coming of the advocate or the Holy Spirit who will help them when we go through difficult times, when we suffer persecution and all those sorts of things.

Now I want to speak more next week about the work of the Holy Spirit as we look at the remainder of these verses in chapter 16. But for now chapter 16 continues on with this same teaching about the world's hatred for Jesus and his followers and Jesus here desperately wants his followers to get the point.

He says in verse 1, I have said these things to keep you from stumbling. Jesus doesn't want his disciples to fall away because they didn't have warnings about difficulties in the future.

[22 : 26] And he goes on and he predicted that they will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, an hour is coming when those who kill you will think that by doing so they are offering worship to God.

The human heart which is hostile to God can grow that hateful and murderous that they think they are doing the right thing. Well this sort of thing happened in the first century and it has happened throughout all of the centuries.

And Jesus here reminds his people that this motivation is caused because they have not known the Father or me. those who oppose Christianity do so because they do not know God the Father and the Son.

Well the persecution that Christians suffered in the early years is well documented. There's libraries of information. And Jesus' prediction came to fulfillment.

shortly after Jesus was put to death Christians were persecuted. The first known Christian martyr we have in the Bible is that guy by the name of Stephen.

[23 : 46] He was stoned to death by the Jewish and religious authorities of the day. And one of those people who looked on was a guy called Saul and he gave it approval.

This stoning. Now the Apostle Paul before he became a Christian himself before he was converted he went around and legally persecuted Christians.

That was part of his mission until he was radically converted. And Christian persecution intensified under the Emperor Nero in the first century.

Nero what did he do? He fed Christians to the lions for sport. He blamed Christians for the woes of the Roman Empire and he further desecrated them by using them for lamps.

And so down the centuries persecution against Christians has continued. But did you know that the worst persecution against Christians has been in our own time while we have been alive?

[25 : 04] Somewhere I believe in the region of 26 million Christians that's more than the population of this country have lost their lives for Christ's sake in places like China Cambodia Mozambique Angola Ethiopia Uganda even in East Timor many other places I'm sure you can think of as well and Russia many people have lost their lives for Christ's sake this century.

As Western Christians we see the world's hatred of Christianity really only in verbal terms. We get attacked from time to time about some of the stances we might make about various issues and so on.

And sometimes when we are verbally attacked for our faith so many of us stumble. But I think it's time that we ask ourselves the question of whether or not we are prepared to die for Christ.

It's not a theoretical question as we so often are led to believe. It's not. Jesus has the clear right to ask it of each one of us who are his followers.

And he gives no guarantees that he will not. You see following Jesus is not a game. When we were looking at this passage earlier on in the week we were thinking about the various Christian persecutions that we know of in our own time.

[26 : 50] And Paul reminded me of a book called Forgive Me Natasha. And I went and re-read it this week.

And it's about a guy called Sergei Kortokov, a Russian police officer who retells the story of his brutal persecution of Christians in the late 60s.

In one of the many raids that he was involved in he tells of how he and a dozen or so officers who were well built and solid and so on break up a baptism being carried out by Christians or believers as they were known in Russia because believers they were very very difficult to sway from their faith and so on.

Anyway these police officers go into this forest where these believers are doing a baptism to persecute these Christians. And these police officers had been tipped off earlier on in the week that there would be this baptism happening somewhere up in this forest in a river.

So they go and they set up an ambush. They wait to pounce on these innocent Christians who want to turn up. To baptize and welcome someone into the flock.

[28 : 17] Innocent men, women and children on that day were brutally bashed for their faith. The pastor was killed.

His body was found a couple of days later floating down a river. I'll leave you to read the details of what happened for yourself. It's very graphic. And it's not pleasant at all.

But this whole book is a graphic account of the sort of persecution that Russian Christians came under while it was a communist state. People were who were prepared to die for that.

And that's the point. These Christians here knew what sort of danger they were in when they professed faith in Christ. And many died as a result knowing what could come their way.

People were persecuted. And there are dozens and dozens of stories of Christian persecution that we can read about on the internet today. Again, as I was researching this, I just went into Alta Vista, one of those search engines, and I typed the words Christian persecution.

[29 : 33] And I got pages and pages of sites about Christian persecution that is happening this very day. News stories of people who have been persecuted for their faith.

Go in, if you've got the internet, type those words yourself. Have a read of some of the stories and you'll be shocked. It's very sobering. Well, friends, having a personal relationship with God is not something that we should take lightly.

It's not a game. It came at the cost of God's very own Son. The ultimate sacrifice was made for us by him on the cross.

And yet, how far are we willing to go for him? Are we prepared to lay down our life for him? I wonder whether the next time we sing this song, which we're not going to sing today, but I wonder whether the next time we sing this song, we can say these words with real meaning.

As a prayer, take my life and let it be, let it be, all you purpose, Lord, for me. Consecrate my passing days. Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

[30 : 56] Take my love, my Lord, I pour at your feet its treasure store. Take myself, and I will be yours for all eternity.

Amen.