

Life in the World

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[0 : 01] Well, let me start by saying what a world we live in. It's crazy, isn't it? Corona craziness from toilet paper to social distancing to limiting of 100 people indoor gatherings to now four square metres. Part of the problem has been that things have changed so quickly people just don't know what to expect. And expectations, when you have the wrong ones, they can often form in us all sorts of discouragements and grief and they can dishearten us.

For some people traveling on holidays, they went to the Great Wall of China and they were expecting to see this. But when they actually got there, they saw that. And so the reality was very different to the expectation and they were very disappointed. Or for another time, some other people went to see the Mona Lisa, expecting to see that. But when they actually got there, this was the reality.

They could hardly see anything of the Mona Lisa. Or the third one is the Maldives, which is my kind of holiday. And that's what they're expecting. But the reality when they got there was that.

And no doubt they were disappointed. And we've seen it already, haven't we? When Coles and Woolworths have very kindly and rightly put an hour in the morning for people to get their own groceries who can't normally get there elsewhere. And when they've turned up expecting to buy things, the shelves have still been empty. Now, I'm not having a go at Coles or Woolworths, but that's just the way it is, isn't it?

When we have expectations that are not met, it often causes discouragement and disheartens us. And it's the same with being a Christian. I know of some young Christians who had expected that once they are a Christian, that life would be a breeze for them. And when it wasn't, they were discouraged and disheartened. I even know some older Christians who thought being a Christian and they expected that God would answer their prayers the way that they wanted to rather than the way God wants to. And when it wasn't answered the way they wanted, they were discouraged and disheartened. And when that happens, people, even Christians, can be tempted to give up. And for Christians, give up on God. Well, today is a bit of a reality check for us. For those joining us from St. John's Blackburn, a special welcome to you. You might like to give a little cheer again. Marty is here and she cheered for you all. But here at Doncaster, we've been working our way through John's Gospel. I know you've been doing Luke's at Blackburn. But as we return to

[2 : 44] John's Gospel, we see that Jesus helps his disciples to have right expectations of life in this world. And he does this so that they're not disheartened, but do take heart and keep following him. And so first expectation that Jesus gives, the outline will be on the slide. It's point one there. The first expectation Jesus gives of life in this world is that it will come with persecution. As I have a look in your Bibles, chapter 15, verse 18. It's Thursday night before the very first Good Friday. And Jesus says, verse 18, 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. This is why the world hates you. Remember what I told you, a servant is not greater than his master. So if they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obey 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. Verse 21, Jesus says, they will treat you this way because of my name, because you are

Christian, because you follow me. In other words, it's persecution for our faith. And this is the first expectation we're to have. You see, if the world persecuted Jesus, then they will persecute us.

The world hated Jesus, then it will hate us. Jesus was the most loving and godly person in history who came to save the world. And yet, not everyone likes hearing that they need to be saved, do they?

And not everyone likes seeing such godliness that shows up their ungodliness. And so while some will be saved, many in the world will persecute.

And again, if they persecuted Jesus, they will persecute us too, even when we seek to love them and share the good news of Jesus with them. Now, of course, this persecution looks different depending on where you are in the world. It was only three years ago when some Christians in Egypt traveling on an excursion on a bus to a monastery, I believe it was, were stopped, taken off, and they were told that if they did not turn to Islam, they would be shot. And 28 of them were killed that day.

[5 : 20] And we have people at our church who knew some of those families. Or in China, it's getting harder to meet as a church. And so this church on the next slide is just one example that was closed last November. And you'll notice the before and after, the cross is gone, the advertising is gone, it's been painted over, the 200 members have been dispersed.

Or even just last month, Boko Haram burnt out a church in Nigeria. Here are the four elders getting ready to meet for the Sunday service in their burnt out building. Of course, for us at a personal level, it's much more subtle, isn't it? For us, it might mean people talk about us behind our back or slander us on social media. We've seen plenty of that in the last couple of years.

Or perhaps overlook you for a job or promotion. For us corporately, it's less subtle, I think. For example, it's been a number of years since the Victorian government removed Christian education from the school timetable. Or after the whole marriage thing, the Israel Folau thing and so on, some churches that were meeting in a school were then asked to leave the school.

Now, while it's sad, and we can certainly pursue legal means to try and make our voice heard, it shouldn't surprise us. We're to expect persecution for following Jesus because, verse 19, we don't belong to the world but to Jesus. We're on his team, not the world's team.

And just like there will be rivalry between teams, so there'll be even greater rivalry between the world and Jesus' team, including persecution. Which means if we never face any persecution of any kind, then it's worth asking ourselves, who do we really belong to? Do we show that we belong to Jesus or to the world? Now, don't mishear me. We're not to go looking for it, no. And certainly when we speak to people, we're meant to be loving and gentle in our manner, absolutely. But we're to have the expectation that persecution will come, for we are not greater than Jesus, such that we can avoid it when he didn't.

[7 : 45] What's more, verses 22 to 24 go on to talk about the fact that because they hated Jesus, not only will they hate us, but they also hate the Father who sent Jesus. By Jesus' words and works, his revealed God to them, but they've hated Jesus, which therefore meant they've hated God. But the point is in verse 25, this was all predicted in the Old Testament, so it should come as no surprise.

Verse 25, but this is to fulfill what is written in their law, they hated me without reason. The 11 apostles particularly needed to hear this right expectation, because they had to testify to the world about Jesus. So verse 26 and 27, it's a long passage, so I've got to move quickly at points. Verse 26, when the advocate comes, whom I will send you 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, testify for you have been with me from the beginning. Here, the advocate, we're told, refers to the Holy Spirit. In ancient times, an advocate was a friend, it was more of a friend than a lawyer, so to speak. But as a friend, they would still advocate for you, still help you. And we learn elsewhere in the Bible that the Spirit helps us to follow Jesus. But here we're told he will testify about Jesus, just like the 11, verse 27, who had been with Jesus since the beginning, were to go out and testify. Now, it's worth remembering, verse 26, by the way, that the Spirit's job is to point people to Jesus. We'll see how in a moment, but it's worth remembering because sometimes people think that we don't talk enough about the Spirit. But the Spirit himself wants us to talk about Jesus. He wants to point us to Jesus. So if we keep talking about the

Spirit, we're going to make his job harder, you see. Or other people will say that I'm looking for a Spirit-filled church. But a Spirit-filled church is a Jesus-following church, for the Spirit's job is to point people to Jesus, you see. And so if you want to find a Spirit-filled church, then you go to one, or you can't go to one at the moment, you can live stream one that you know follows Jesus.

But the main point here is that these 11, along with us, are to expect persecution in this world, so that we're not surprised by it, nor thrown from Jesus. Have a look at chapter 16, verse 1 to 4.

Jesus says, You see, they need to remember and expect persecution so that they won't fall away.

[11 : 07] They won't be discouraged or disheartened and give up. One of the greatest Spanish writers of all time, Google tells me, is this man, Miguel de Cervantes. I'm sure I'm pronouncing that incorrectly, but anyway.

He's famous for this line, forewarned is to be forearmed. To be prepared is half the victory. That's true, isn't it? But that's what Jesus is doing here, do you see? Helping them have right expectations so they're forewarned and therefore are forearmed. They're prepared. But life in this world will not only come with persecution, it will also point to come with the Spirit.

So have a look at verse 4 to 7. He says, I did not tell you these things from the beginning because I was with you, but now I am going to the Father who sent me. None of you ask me, where are you going? Rather, you are filled with grief because I have said these things. But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away.

Because unless I go away, the advocate will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. Again, remember it's Thursday night before that very first Good Friday, and Jesus has been speaking the whole night about leaving them and going to the Father. But instead of the disciples asking Jesus what this means for him, namely that he has to go to the cross and die first, they're more concerned about what it means for them. They are filled with grief for themselves. But instead of getting annoyed at their self-centeredness, Jesus comforts them by telling them it's for their good that he goes.

Why? Well, so that he can send the Spirit to them and save even more people in the world. Have a look at the Spirit's work in verses 8 to 11.

[13 : 14] Verse 8, When he comes, the Spirit, he will prove the world or convict the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment.

About sin, that is that they are guilty of sins and have to pay for them because people do not believe in Jesus. About righteousness, that is that their righteousness is often shallow and hypocritical, just as Jesus showed the Pharisees. But now that Jesus is going to the Father, where you can no longer see me, now the Spirit will show the world their hypocritical righteousness.

And verse 11, About judgment, For if the prince of this world, that is Satan, is condemned, then so too will be the world who follows him.

But the point is, Jesus goes so that the Spirit can come and work all over the world. That's why it's for their good.

Before they had Jesus, which was brilliant, but he was only in Israel. But now the apostles can go out all over the world and the Spirit can work all over the world, convicting people of sin, righteousness and judgment that they might turn to Christ.

[14 : 30] You see, even though the world hates Jesus and the Father, God has not given up on the world. And even though the world hates Christians, God will change by his Spirit, some of them, to become Christians.

It's why we pray for our non-Christian family and friends, is it not? That God's Spirit might prove them wrong, convict them and convert them. That they might trust in Jesus.

And this means, by the way, for us, that we're not alone as we seek to tell others about Jesus. We have a slightly different role to the 11. We weren't with Jesus from the beginning. But we can take whatever opportunities come our way to share Jesus.

And it's not our job to convict and convert. It's the Spirit's job to do that. Which kind of frees us, really, doesn't it? It doesn't depend all on us. And if we make a mess of our opportunity, that's all right.

It's the Spirit's job to convict and convert. We are to love, pray, and take whatever opportunities come our way. But the Spirit will not only convicts and converts the world.

[15 : 40] He also guides the apostles into all truth. Have a look at verse 12 to 15. He says, All that belongs to the Father is mine.

That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me, and he will make known to you. Now, notice verse 12 here. Jesus is speaking specifically to the 11 again.

Because it's those who cannot bear to hear more. Remember, they're filled with grief. They were the ones at the end of chapter 15 who were with Jesus from the beginning. And when the Spirit comes, he will guide these 11 into all truth, including the apostle Paul, whom Jesus will later call.

But notice, it's not some truth. It's all truth. So it's not as though we need more apostles to tell us more truth. And I think we need to remember this because there's this growing movement amongst some churches to call ministers apostles.

In fact, there's even a whole church movement called the New Apostolic Church. But that's not what Jesus is saying here, is it? So if I or anyone else at HGD starts calling ourselves an apostle, pour a bucket of cold water on us, won't you?

[17 : 14] But for us, this means we can have great confidence that what we have here written by the apostles, like John, is the truth.

Because the Spirit will only speak to them what he hears from Jesus. And verse 15, Jesus has everything from the Father. And so there's this kind of unbroken chain of truth.

Have a look on the next slide where I've tried to represent it there for you. You know, everything from the Father is given to the Son. And the Son tells the Spirit what to say.

And the Spirit guides the 11 apostles and Paul into all truth. They write it down so that what we have in our hot little hands, which I hope you have, is true, the Bible.

We can be confident that what we have in the Scriptures is the truth. So we're not wasting our time tuning in to this live stream.

[18 : 15] We're not wasting our time putting what we read into practice. Because it is the truth. Well, life in this world comes with trouble. So don't be surprised, but be forewarned so that you are forearmed.

And life in this world comes with the Spirit who convicts and converts. So we're not alone in evangelism. And he also guided the 11 into all truth so we can have confidence in the Bible.

And thirdly, on this slide, is that life in this world comes with joy and peace.

See verse 16, Jesus starts to speak about his death and resurrection. He says, In a little while you will see me no more, his death. And then after a little while, three days, you will see me, his resurrection.

But the disciples are not quite sure what he's talking about. There's a bit of to-ing and fro-ing. And come with me down to verse 20. We don't have time to unpack every verse. Verse 20, Jesus repeats himself.

[19 : 18] He says, Very truly, I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy.

The world rejoiced at Jesus' death. The Jewish leaders no doubt congratulated one another. While we know the disciples mourned at Jesus' death. Yet a little while later, their grief turned to joy when they saw their Lord risen from the dead.

And their joy was such that they forgot about their grief altogether. Perhaps like a mother after her child is born. You see verse 21. Verse 21, A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come.

But when the baby is born, she forgets the anguish because her joy that a child is born into the world. Now, I'm not sure this is true for all mothers, having never given birth myself.

And the last comment I made to my wife, Michelle, about childbirth not being that bad, I very quickly regretted. I know she was very kind about it. But I take it that when they see their newborn child resting on their chest, the agony of what they've just gone through kind of goes out of their mind.

[20 : 33] And I know for many mothers, the agony of childbirth has been forgotten because they go back for child two and three and sometimes four and five. Well, verse 22, So with you, says Jesus to the 11 disciples, 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 Jesus rises from the dead, their grief will turn to joy. And I take it this joy is also for us too, because Jesus remains risen from the dead, doesn't he?

But why does Jesus' resurrection bring us joy? We know the disciples saw him in the flesh and that would have brought them joy. But why us? Well, because his resurrection signals that his death really did pay for our sins.

It's like making a cake. Go with me on this one. You mix the ingredients together. You put it in the oven, the tomb, if you like. But it's not until you bring the cake out and see it risen that you know it's all worked.

Isn't it? Also too, with Jesus' resurrection from the dead, when he comes out of the tomb and we see him risen, then we know his death has worked. It really did pay for our sins.

[21 : 55] So we can, I was going to say we can have our cake and eat it too, but that's not quite right. We can have something much better. We can now have a relationship with God, such that one day he will raise us physically from the dead as well.

And our relationship with God means we can call him father now. We can have great joy of direct access to God, where God will never leave or forsake us, as we heard in our first reading.

Have a look at verse 23 and 24. Now when Jesus says we will receive whatever we ask for in his name, it's not a blank check so that if we ask for Ferrari and say in Jesus' name, Amen, that we'll magically get it.

His name is not like a magical talisman or special word like abracadabra or something. Rather names represent a person's character, his will.

And then when we pray according or in line with his character, his will, that's when we'll receive those things. And that's when our joy will be made complete. For example, I remember in high school praying for God to help me to control my language more.

[23 : 25] That's what Jesus wants for us. It's according to his character and will. And over time, God answered that prayer and I was able to do that. And that actually did bring me joy because I knew I was pleasing my heavenly father.

I was making him proud, if you like. Or I remember another time praying with some other people for a guy at our church to become a Christian. It took a long time, several years.

But we received that answer. He became a Christian and brought us all great joy. Or when someone was suffering greatly, they prayed that God would help them to keep trusting in him, which is according to Jesus' will and character.

God answered that prayer and they continued to trust him through their distress. And they even found joy of knowing God was with them despite their trouble. That's how it seems to work, I think.

But part of the joy is also realizing that we have an extraordinary privilege. That's what Jesus goes on to talk about in verses 26 to 27, this privilege of direct access to God.

[24 : 24] Have a look at verse 26. Notice Jesus is saying, look, I'm not going to ask the father on your behalf.

You have direct access. You can ask him yourself because he loves you. I mean, that's an extraordinary privilege that ought to bring us joy. If it doesn't, then perhaps we've forgotten how extraordinary this is.

The Jews never had that direct access. They always had to go through priests and prophets. But now we can go directly to God himself. I still remember vividly praying with a mate when we were about 18 years old.

So, you know, only a few years ago. It's hard with the streaming thing, isn't it? I'm assuming you're laughing at me. But anyway, he prayed. I remember him praying, thank you, God, that we can call you, who is the whopping creator of the universe, father.

It was the word whopping that caught my attention first. But then I realized what he had already realized, the privilege that we can come to the God of the universe directly, call him father.

[25 : 39] And that brings us joy. You see, the relationship that Jesus opened up for us by his death and resurrection is a relationship that brings us joy. But his death and resurrection also brings us peace.

And we need to, I'm almost there. One of the bad things about live streaming is you can turn me off at any time. Maybe I shouldn't have told you that. Anyway, we're almost there. But verses 29 to 30, the disciples think they now get Jesus and they believe in him.

But they're very young in the faith because Jesus points out in verse 32 that they will still scatter. In an hour or so, when Jesus is arrested, they will desert Jesus. But come with me to verse 33 where Jesus wraps up the passage.

Verse 33, he says, In Jesus, we can have peace.

So no matter what the world throws at us, we can have peace.

[27 : 00] If the world throws persecution at us, we can have the peace of knowing that in the end, we will win. We're on Jesus' team. If the world throws our lives upside down with health and so on, well, we can have the peace of knowing that God is our father who will never leave us nor forsake us.

Perhaps you're quite enjoying this live streaming business. You get to sleep in, stay in your PJs, have your own nice coffee and so on. But if this disease keeps going and we have to keep quarantining or isolating or whatever it is, then I suspect many of us will start to feel the isolation.

But even if that's the case, we have the peace of knowing that our world, even with its rules, can never break our unbreakable fellowship in Christ.

For Christ has overcome the world. He has secured both our future and our fellowship in him. So let me finish.

As we live life in this world, we're to live with the right expectations. We're to expect that there will be persecution. So don't give up. But instead, you know, be forewarned so that you are forearmed.

[28 : 20] That you might go, yep, I knew this was coming. It's OK. And we're also to expect the spirit to work in the world and not only helping us to follow Jesus, but also convicting and converting others.

And so we're not alone in evangelism. We're free to play our part without the pressure of having to convert someone. And thirdly, we're to expect joy and peace amidst the trouble in this world.

For by his death and resurrection, Jesus has opened up a new relationship with God for us. And he's overcome the world. Jesus says in this world, you will have trouble, but take heart.

I've overcome the world. Let me lead us in prayer. Please pray. Our gracious heavenly father, we do thank you for this reminder this morning. That life in this world will come with persecution, but it will also come with the spirit and it will come with joy and peace amidst our trouble.

For Jesus has overcome the world. Help us, we pray, to have these right expectations so that we might not be disheartened, but that we might take heart and keep following him.

[29 : 34] We ask this in his name. Amen.