

The World's Hatred and the Spirit's Witness

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[0 : 00] Good morning, church. It's good to see you all. If you're on the live stream, we're glad you joined as well. Our sermon text today starts in John chapter 15, verse 18.

And we'll go up to the first half of verse 4 in chapter 16. If you're here in the sanctuary, that's page 848 in the Pew Bible. You can follow along there.

Today's text is actually a good reminder that the chapter and verse divisions of our Bibles were added much later to the text. And sometimes that means the chapter breaks don't always capture the units of thought perfectly.

So that's why we're kind of looking at the end of 15 and the beginning of John 16. Well, let me pray for us, and then I'll read. Let's pray together. Our Father in heaven, as we have just sung, we humble ourselves before you, and we wait on you.

God, we wait on you because we know that in our own strength and in our own wisdom, God, we can truly do nothing apart from you. So we ask for your spirit to come and to illuminate your word once again, as you have done throughout the ages, that you would be moving and speaking to us through the passage we read and through the words that I share.

[1 : 24] God, raise us up, we pray, and strengthen us for the mission that you have for us to glorify you and your Son. Pray this in Jesus' name and in the power of the Spirit. Amen. All right, so remember, these are the words of Jesus to the apostles on the night before he was arrested in the midst of what we call the farewell discourse.

So, John chapter 15, verse 18. Jesus says, 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. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.

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. Whoever hates me hates my Father also. 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. But the word that is written in their law must be fulfilled. They hated me without a cause. 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.

[2 : 58] And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning. I've said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. They will put you out of the synagogues.

Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he's offering a service to God. And they will do these things, because they have not known the Father, nor me. But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes, you may remember that I told them to you.

Well, so not long ago, there was a popular book series called The Worst Case Scenario Survival Handbook.

Do you remember those books? The idea of this series was that they would describe just terrible events. Earthquakes, shark attacks, alien invasions. And the book would offer sort of illustrated instructions on how to survive that worst case scenario.

So for example, they made a parenting edition. And one of the chapters was how to deal with a screaming baby on an airplane, which kind of feels like a worst case scenario, sometimes for parents.

[4 : 06] And here are the instructions. First, make highly visible efforts to quiet your child. Two, create confusion and distraction. Three, do not panic if your child will still not calm down. Four, use the laboratory. Five, bribe fellow passengers for forgiveness. Six, and last, remember and remind yourself that you will never see these people again.

But on a serious note, in the life of faith, as followers of Jesus, what is the worst case scenario? When things get hard, when opposition comes, what's the worst thing that can happen?

Near the end of our passage, Jesus says, I've said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. According to Jesus, the worst case scenario for his followers in trial, in hardship, isn't a loss of reputation.

The worst case scenario isn't ridicule or rejection. The worst case scenario isn't even death. The worst case scenario for Jesus for us is falling away. That is, departing the faith, no longer holding to Jesus as Lord, walking away from the only source of eternal life.

[5 : 23] The worst case scenario is falling away. Now remember, in this part of John's gospel, Jesus is preparing the disciples for his upcoming departure through the cross and for their upcoming mission through the Holy Spirit.

And in the first half of John 15, that mission is described as bearing fruit in love by abiding in Jesus. This kingdom community rooted and connected to Jesus, the true vine, will be a community of missional love, drawing men and women into a relationship with God in Christ.

But the question arises, how will the world respond to this community? How will the world respond to this community that abides in Jesus as the true vine, that holds to him as the only and true source of life, as the only and true God?

Well, Jesus is clear. As the mission goes forth, there will be opposition. And when faced with that opposition, we will face the worst case scenario.

We will be tempted to fall away. So Jesus tells us three things in this passage so that we might not fall away when opposition comes.

[6 : 40] As our loving shepherd, he prepares the apostles and us to stand firm to not fall away when opposition comes. And the three things that Jesus tells us here are this. He says, first, the world's hatred is inevitable.

But second, the Spirit's ministry among you is countercultural. And then third, he says, my word, the word of Jesus is reliable.

So we're going to look at those three things. So first, Jesus says to the apostles and to us, don't fall away. The world's hatred is inevitable. Now we see this in verses 18 through 25.

Now in any relationship, it's important to have the right expectations, right? When you're preparing to take a new job, it's good to clarify the expectations with your employer to talk through your job description to get on the same page.

When you're preparing for marriage, it's really good to clarify your expectations with your future spouse. And some of these, you don't even realize you have until conflicts come, right? Well, I thought you were going to do the dishes.

[7 : 41] Well, I thought you were going to pick up the kids. Oh, I thought we'd always live in the city. But in the same way, as followers of Jesus on mission, we have to get clear expectations on our relationship with the world.

Now what does Jesus mean by the world here in John's Gospel? Well, the world doesn't mean the sort of whole created order, what we would call the natural world. Rather, the world in John's Gospel is a somewhat technical term referring to human society, human culture, running and operating without any reference to the true God.

The world in John's Gospel is the human world in rebellion to its true God. Human culture and society arranged and lived according to the idols of its own choosing.

Now, what should the church expect in its relationship to the world? Well, at one point, Jesus says to his followers in Matthew chapter 5, for example, that you're going to be salt and light in the world and people will see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

So on the one hand, if the church is truly being the church, there will be times when the culture that we find ourselves in will have to admit that there's something there to admire.

[9 : 01] After all, Jesus just said in John chapter 13, by this, all people will know you are my disciples if you love one another. So in every culture, there'll be some things about the church that are admired.

But Jesus makes it crystal clear here that that can't be our only expectation. At the same time, Jesus says, the world's also going to hate you.

Verse 18 begins by saying, if the world hates you. Now, that sounds somewhat conditional, right? Sometimes we'll be hated, sometimes not. But then at the end of the very next verse, we realize that what Jesus is saying isn't that the world's hatred is conditional, it's actually inevitable.

Therefore, verse 19 says, the world hates you. And as Jesus says here, we will be hated in the same ways that Jesus was hated by the world.

A servant is not above his master. Jesus was misunderstood during his ministry. And so at times will we be as a church. Jesus was called crazy and out of his mind more than once.

[10 : 05] So at times will we be as we faithfully follow Jesus. Jesus was rejected and ridiculed by his family, his neighbors, his friends. And so at times will we be. Jesus was called an enemy of the people, bad for society.

So at times has and will the church. Jesus was falsely accused, falsely condemned. He was physically beaten, tortured, and shamefully executed.

The world hated Jesus in all these ways. And so the world will hate his followers. in all those ways. Even today, there are Christians being put to death for their faithful allegiance to Jesus.

And whereas you or I may not face persecution like that, our brothers and sisters in many parts of the world are. And we must be praying for them. But what Jesus is saying here doesn't just apply to our brothers and sisters in other parts of the world, but it applies to us too.

Don't be surprised if the world, yes, hates you, rejects you, ridicules you, misunderstands you, excludes you, penalizes you, ignores you, even condemns you.

[11 : 16] The world's hatred is inevitable. But why? Why is it inevitable? Well, Jesus answers that question too.

And the answer has two parts. On the one hand, the world will hate us because we don't belong to the world anymore. Look at verse 19. Jesus says, Friends, what does it mean to be the church?

It means to experience the free grace of Jesus' choosing love, setting his love on you, freeing you from sin, bringing you into a whole new kingdom where he is king.

Being the church means being a new community of love right in the midst of the old. And that means we're not of the world anymore. We don't march to the same drummer, we don't bow to the same idols, we don't live for the same goals, and in doing so, we're salt and light to the world, as Jesus says.

But, it's a bit like a heart transplant. You know, when a surgeon performs a heart transplant, this whole new organ is being placed into the body's system, right?

[12 : 36] And that organ is being put into that system to bring life and health and to keep the thing going. But the reality is that the old system doesn't always accept the new heart.

Sometimes the body will turn against the new organ and reject it and attack it as different and alien. And it's the same way with the church and the world. The church is a whole new thing in the middle of the world to bring life to the world, but it's not of the world, and the world constantly rejects it.

We live for a different king and a different kingdom. But now, here's the really surprising thing about what Jesus is saying here. When you think of the world, society arranged without reference to the true God, who or what comes to mind for you?

Now, it's initially easy to sort of think about, well, you know, it's those people who just reject God altogether. It's the really obvious, openly godless folks out there, like I used to be.

But consider, look at chapter 16, verse 2, where Jesus says about the world, they will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he's offering service to God.

[13 : 54] So you see, it's not just openly irreligious people who constitute the world. It can also be really, really religious people too. The ones in the synagogues who think they're offering a service to God.

You see, what this means, friends, is that the world can sometimes wear a mask of relativism, but the world can also wear a mask of conservatism as well.

And our king tells us to live lives that challenge the world in all of its forms. After all, as followers of Jesus, we care about the oppressed and the poor and the fatherless and the widow.

We care about injustice and oppression and wrong, but that doesn't make Christians quote-unquote progressives, as the world likes to say. We also care about the unborn and family and marriage and religious liberty, but that doesn't make Christians conservatives, as our culture likes to say.

Following King Jesus means that we won't fit easily into any of the world's molds. And that means Christians will be disliked and even hated at times by so-called progressives and conservatives.

[15 : 08] After all, the Roman establishment and the Jewish religious establishment both had their reasons for wanting Jesus out of the way. And it will be the same for us too.

We are not of the world in any of its forms. The world rejects Jesus, so it will at times reject us too. But a little deeper, why does the world reject Jesus?

Well, that's what verses 21 through 25 are all about. Look at verse 21, but all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. Jesus says here that his words, in verse 22, and his works, in verse 24, gave abundant evidence of his divine identity and his saving power.

His words and his works gave so much evidence that now there's no excuse. No one can plead ignorance. That's what Jesus means when he says, if I hadn't done these things, they would not be guilty of sin.

That's a way of saying they now have all the evidence they need, and yet they still reject it. Why? Well, Jesus says, because they're blind to the reality of the true God.

[16 : 28] So much so that, like David said in Psalm 69, so Jesus can say, they hated me without a cause. The world rejects Jesus and then rejects the followers of Jesus not because of some kind of fault or lack of evidence in Christ, but because they're blinded and trapped by sin's power, just like all of us were before God's grace came to us.

Now, sin, you see, at its deepest level isn't just sort of particular actions that break God's law. Sometimes I like to think about sin as sort of this giant, false narrative that captures our minds and imaginations.

It's this giant, false narrative that says, your happiness is found by putting yourself in the center of your story or by putting your family in the center of your story or by putting your nation in the center of your story.

Sin is like this giant, false narrative that tells us life should be lived for anything other than the glory of the triune God, and it shapes everything we think and see and love and do.

And we buy into that false narrative so deeply that our eyes are closed to the reality of God and the reality of Christ. And that's why the world's hatred is so inevitable, because sin's power has been rampant in our world.

[17 : 59] The world's hatred is inevitable, and Jesus tells us this, so we might not fall away. So, fellow Christian, let me ask, what are your expectations? Now, it is very natural to want to be liked, to want to have a good report with those around us.

And praise God, many of us do. But as a follower of Jesus, do you expect the world around you to always like you, to always approve of you, to always affirm you? If so, then you are in for a rude awakening.

Like a foolish employee who never read the job description, or the foolish husband who never talked to his wife about what sort of life they wanted to live together.

If we as Christians always expect the world around us to like us, we are headed for a painful surprise. So, brothers and sisters, don't set your heart, your trust, on the approval of the world.

If you're being true to Jesus, then you'll never always get it. But here's the good news. If you're being true to Jesus, then you won't ever really need it.

[19 : 14] Because what does the gospel say? The gospel says that even if the entire world were to rise up in hatred against you, you have the only approval that really matters.

The God who made you and who made everything that we see. The God whose glory can satisfy your soul forever. The God who is so unbelievably holy that his presence would melt the earth.

The God who is so unbelievably loving that his presence would melt even the hardest heart. That God, the triune God known in Jesus, that God in the gospel has set his favor on you.

Even though you and I have rejected him. Even though you and I have lived without any reference to him. Even though we've bought in to the giant false narrative that life can be lived for something other than God.

Even so, God has let his full hatred of human sin and evil and injustice, including your and my sin and evil and injustice, God has let his full hatred of sin fall on his own person in our place.

[20 : 35] God took on our human nature in Jesus to bear the just hatred of our sin so that all who turn from sin and trust in Christ might have full favor with God completely free of charge.

And that means if we've placed our trust in Jesus, if we become his follower, if we've joined his family, if we become a part of the church, then we don't need the world's approval. Because we have an approval that nothing can compare to.

I mean, think about it. If you're at work this summer and the summer intern comes to you and says, man, well done. It's great to have you around here.

You will think to yourself, well, that's nice. But their opinion doesn't really matter all that much, does it? I mean, by the end of the summer, the summer intern isn't even going to be around anymore.

Who cares what they think? It's nice to be liked, but... But, if the founder of the company comes to your office after a big presentation and says, well done.

[21 : 41] It's good to have you on the team. Well, that means something, doesn't it? But friends, consider, in Christ, we have an approval infinitely greater.

It's so great that nothing in this world can shake it. The CEO of the universe has called you into his office and said, well done.

It's good to have you here. So even though the world's hatred is inevitable, friends, don't fall away. That's Jesus' first point. But I think that raises a natural question, right?

How should we respond to the world's hatred? If we expect it as inevitable and if we don't fall away, how should we respond? How should we react?

Now, if we're honest, I think too often in those moments, it's like our fight or flight response kicks in. When the world hates us, we either return the favor and hate them back, we fight, or when the world hates us, we just withdraw and we quietly go away.

[22 : 50] That's flight. But you know, neither response is what Jesus calls us to. And this brings us to our second big point of the passage.

The world's hatred is inevitable, yes, but Jesus says to us, the Spirit's ministry in us is counter-cultural. Look again at verses 26 through 27. Jesus says, 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 you also will bear witness because you've been with me from the beginning. So you see, in the face of opposition, we can respond with neither fight nor flight. Rather, the Spirit empowers us to do something very counter-cultural and very different.

He empowers us to bear witness. We don't return evil for evil. We don't retreat into the safety of a holy huddle. No, we bear witness to Christ.

Now, what does it mean to bear witness? Well, it's kind of like giving a testimony in a court case. Jesus is speaking to the apostles here in John 15. And as he says, they've been with him from the beginning.

[24 : 04] So now, as they enter out into the courtroom of the world, they can give their eyewitness testimony to all that Jesus is and all that Jesus has done. But you know, in a derivative way, in a related way, today, we as followers of Jesus still bear witness.

We stand on the eyewitness testimony of the apostles. We are empowered by the same Holy Spirit. And we have our own first-hand experience to share of the saving love of Christ.

And so we can speak about who Jesus is and what he's done. Now, as the church, I think we need to pray to become more adept at turning cultural conversations into witness-bearing gospel conversations.

Too often, we get mired in sort of the cultural issues of the day without really bearing witness. Now, how do we do that? Well, let me just offer some simple suggestions.

I think witness-bearing in this way requires that we pray, that we ask, that we listen, and that we speak. So first, we pray. We pray that the Holy Spirit will be at work in us and through us and in and through those around us to whom the Lord has sent us.

[25 : 26] In a couple weeks, we're going to dive more into the ministry of the Holy Spirit's work in the world in the rest of John chapter 16. So we'll get more into that. But first, we have to be praying.

And then second, we ask. Too often, as Christians, we're just talking. But we need to ask. Ask open-ended questions to the people that God has put in your life.

Show genuine interest in them. What are they into? What motivates them? What are they afraid of? What are they hoping for in life? Ask. Get to know them. And then, we listen.

Don't be quick to speak. Be quick to listen. And then, don't be afraid to ask another question. We're really bad at this culturally, right? Oftentimes, we ask a question only to sort of buy us enough time to figure out what we can say, right?

But no, friends. Ask and listen. And then listen listen some more. Really hear the people around you. It's such a profound way to actually love someone, to actually listen to them.

[26 : 40] But after we've prayed and asked and listened and listened some more, finally, we speak. And don't be afraid in your speaking, friends, to start at square one of the gospel.

that there's a God who created us and who loves us. And all our life is meant to be lived in fellowship with him. And that's what flourishing really means. But none of us have lived that way.

And there's a great chasm that's opened up between us and God. We've turned away from him and we try to live our own way. And that's what the Bible calls sin. And that sin has resulted in death. But rather than leave us there, God has made a way to forgive our sin and reconcile us to himself through his son.

And Jesus lived a perfect life and died the death that we deserve so we could be reconciled to God on the basis of what he did and not on the basis of what we do. So then now when we admit that we're sinners and we trust in Jesus alone to rescue us, we're given a whole new status and fellowship with God and we're given a whole new power by his spirit to love God and love each other.

So in life, we follow Jesus as our Lord, gladly conforming all of our life to him, because he made us and because he knows what's best for us. And after all, if he died for us, then surely he loves us.

[27 : 56] Now here's the thing. You're never going to be able to have that conversation with everybody you interact with, right? But you can have parts of that conversation. You can start at square one and just start sowing seeds.

Witness bearing isn't easy. It's easier to kick into fight or flight, right? But listen to what Paul says in Romans 12. Paul says, bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse them.

Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.

To the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he's thirsty, give him something to drink, for by so doing, you'll eat burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

And Jesus promises us that the Holy Spirit will be with us, empowering us for this countercultural work. But lastly, Jesus tells us not just that the world's hatred is inevitable, not just that the Spirit's ministry among us is countercultural, but finally, that his word is reliable.

- [29 : 16] Our sermon text ends with Jesus saying this, but I've said these things to you that when their hour comes, you may remember that I told them to you. But what difference does that make?

You know, we can see how having the right expectations about the world, that's easy to see how that helps us not now fall away, knowing how to respond through the Spirit's witness-bearing ministry that helps us not to fall into fight or flight.

But how does Jesus telling us all this beforehand help us not fall away when the opposition comes? Well, what Jesus is showing us here is that no matter what the world throws at us, no matter how painful the opposition gets, no matter how costly it becomes to follow Jesus, no matter what comes, Jesus is still the King.

His word is still sovereign. His plan is still going forth. Not even the world's hatred can thwart the sovereign, gracious plan of King Jesus for the Kingdom to come and for His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Remember, when opposition comes, this is exactly what He said would happen. At the end of John 16, Jesus will say, in the world you will have tribulation, but take heart, I have overcome the world.

- [30 : 45] You know, when Jesus went to the cross, it looked like defeat, didn't it? It looked like the world had won. It looked like the grand false narrative of sin just might be true after all.

But when Christ rose from the grave on Sunday morning, it all became clear. the cross wasn't our Lord's greatest defeat.

It was His greatest victory. He had overcome the world. He had swallowed up all the evil, pain, and death. He had taken the worst the world had to give.

And in return, He gave us life. And if we join Him in His suffering, we will join Him in His glory. Remember again, the words of the Apostle Paul in Romans 8, for I consider, he says, that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Jesus' word, friends, is reliable. That word, above all earthly powers, no thanks to them abideth.

- [31 : 57] The Spirit and the gifts are ours through Him who with us sideth. let goods and kindred go. This mortal life also, the body they may kill.

God's truth abides still. His kingdom is forever. Amen. You see, the world's hatred isn't the worst thing that can happen to you, friends.

Losing worldly goods and wealth, that's not the worst case scenario. Losing kindred, friends, and family, losing even your life, it isn't the worst case scenario. Having God in Christ, never losing Him, that's all that really matters because His kingdom is forever.

And Jesus has said these things to us to keep us from falling away. The world may hate us, but the Spirit will empower us, and the Word of Christ will sustain us as we go out on this mission of love that He sent us on.

Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, we pray for a fresh filling of Your Spirit this morning. Lord, too often we are tempted to just retreat when You call us to advance.

- [33 : 12] Lord, too often we are tempted to wage war with worldly weapons and to become like our old selves again. So, Lord, we need You and we need Your Spirit to empower us to be gracious, to be bold, to bear witness, and to hold fast.

Jesus, thank You that You complete the good work that You start and we can rely on You.
We pray this in Your name. Amen.