

3. The hatred of the world

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[0 : 00] Well, let's turn to John chapter 15 again, if we may please, John 15. And here at verse 18, we're roughly halfway through this long section, chapters 14, 15 and 16, where Jesus gives his disciples instruction just before his crucifixion.

Now, the sequence of events, I'm just wanting to set this in its context here, the sequence of events is this, that in chapter 13, Jesus and his 12 apostles, all 12 at this stage, share the supper together.

Then after supper, Jesus takes a towel and a bowl of water, he washes their feet. Judas then goes out into the night to do what he has to do, and he's gone. And then Jesus, with the 11, sits down and he teaches them.

He gives them this instruction beginning toward the end of chapter 13. Now, the disciples, of course, were troubled. They couldn't fully understand what was about to happen to Jesus, and they couldn't fully understand what was about to happen to them.

But they listened carefully, and they remember these words, and of course, many years later, John, who was one of the 11, wrote it all down, and that's why we have it in our hands today.

[1 : 16] Now, try to imagine their faces for a moment, these 11 men, as Jesus speaks the words of chapter 15 to them. In the first 11 verses, which we looked at a couple of weeks ago, he speaks to them about himself being the vine, and they the branches.

And their job is to abide in him, to stay close to him, and united to him. And he says, if you do that, look at verse 11, you will be filled with my joy. Joy.

So I guess at that point, a watery smile might have flitted across their faces as they thought of the joy that would be theirs. Then we have the next little section, verses 12 to 17, where Jesus says, my commandment, not my suggestion, but my commandment, is that you love each other, and that you're fruitful.

That too is my commandment. That's why I've chosen you. Well, again, smiling might have been appropriate to them as they heard those words. But when they hear what Jesus has to say at verse 18, I imagine that every trace of a smile would have drained out of their faces.

If they were still eating and drinking at that point, they perhaps set down their cups and plates and stared at the floor and gulped. Look at verse 18.

[2 : 31] If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. Now this is a sobering message. It wouldn't have entirely surprised the disciples, because after all, they knew how Jesus was regarded.

They knew that he was very popular with the crowds, most of the time, but also they knew that he was deeply resented by the Jewish leaders and authorities, indeed to the point of hatred.

But isn't that an odd fact, when you stand back to think about it? Here is this wonderful man, Jesus, the finest man that the world has ever seen, a man who perfectly combined grace, love, compassion, truthfulness, wisdom, mercy, every other virtue you could name, the most delightful human being that the world has ever seen, and yet hated by the world.

Well, friends, this is our territory for this evening. We must allow the Lord Jesus to teach us from this passage why the world hates him and why the world hated his disciples back in the first century and why the world will continue to hate his disciples in every generation.

This is a sobering message, but I trust in the end it will be encouraging to us and will put fresh energy and determination into our hearts to serve him. So, verse 18, if the world hates you, that word world, as Jesus uses it here, means human society as organized without reference to God.

[4 : 08] Mankind doing his own thing. Mankind living in rebellion against God. We might just simply call it non-Christian society. That's the world. And the world, says Jesus, hates him.

Now, he doesn't mean necessarily that everybody who is not a Christian hates him with equal fierceness. Many people who are not Christians, as you know, tolerate the activities of Christians and treat us as no more than a little bit odd.

We all have friends who know that we're Christians and yet they're still happy to be our friends. So, he's not suggesting that everybody who is not a Christian is seething with anger against him or against people like us in an active way.

We know that many who are not Christians do admire him. They're usually from a fairly safe distance. What he means is that non-Christian society as a whole will ultimately reject his claim to be their rightful king.

I'm your king. That's his message to the world. And the world replies, we will not have you as our king. We intend to rule ourselves. And if you press this claim of kingship upon us, we will utterly reject you.

[5 : 21] Nor do we wish to have you as our saviour, because we don't see that we need to be saved. Now, the roots of this, of course, go way back into the Garden of Eden to Genesis chapter 3.

But you'll see it emerging very strongly, for example, in Psalm 2. Remember Psalm 2, how it begins. Why, asks the psalmist, why do the nations rage?

The kings of the earth set themselves, in other words, take up a determined and combative position. They set themselves against the Lord and against his anointed, saying, let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.

In other words, the rulers of the world, again, there are exceptions like our present queen, but the rulers of the world, its kings and presidents and military leaders, hate the very idea of submitting to God or to his anointed king, who is Jesus.

They regard submitting to the Lord as being in bondage, tied up with cords. So they say, let us burst their bonds apart and cast their cords away from us.

[6 : 26] And that's the spirit of the world. We hate the very idea of submitting to Jesus or of honouring him as our rightful king. Now, we'll get into Jesus' teaching about this in just a moment in John 15.

But let me first try and describe a little bit more how the world hates Jesus. When a person becomes a Christian, that person is doing something in becoming a Christian which the world regards as antagonistic and offensive.

If you become something else, anything else, the world will not bristle up against you. So if, for example, you become a Monroe bagger, do you know what a Monroe bagger is?

Well, the world is not going to mind, is it? If you become a grower of prized chrysanthemums, or if you put up a polytunnel in your back garden and start growing vegetables, people will simply say, how sweet.

They might regard you as slightly soft in the head or slightly obsessive, but they'll be indulgent towards you, won't they? Dear Aunty Fiona, growing all that rhubarb for her friends, isn't she a scream?

[7 : 37] Now, Aunty Fiona, she's not making the world's hackles rise by growing rhubarb, is she? But if she becomes a Christian, people think, whoa, whoa, whoa, what is this going on?

They begin to bristle. Why? Because Aunty Fiona's submission to King Jesus is an immediate challenge to her friends that they should submit to King Jesus too.

And submission is the issue. Submission to him is always the issue. Now, folk who are not Christians may try to pretend that the problem is not submission.

The problem really is a question of understanding or a problem in the mind. So they will say, it's all right for you Christians to believe because you've come to understand it. You've made sense of it. But I can't see it.

It doesn't make sense to me. But actually, the problem is not in the mind, not in the understanding. It's in the will. Yes, the gospel is to be believed and therefore understood.

[8 : 35] But even more importantly, the New Testament emphasizes that the gospel is to be obeyed. That's the sticking point. The sticking point is here in the heart, not up here in the head.

And the world hates Jesus not because he's asking people to understand some difficult mental puzzle, but because he's commanding submission to him as their king and their lord.

And if there are those here who are not Christians, and I hope there are, you're most welcome here, but if you're not yet a Christian, that is the problem. That's your problem. Don't kid yourself that you can't understand.

The problem is that you won't submit and you won't have peace until you do submit. So, the world hates Jesus' demand to be its rightful king.

And the world will show its hatred in a hundred different ways in the actual life of a nation like ours. So let me give a few examples of this. First, you'll get the articulate hatred of some of our leading intellectuals.

[9 : 41] So, Professor Richard Dawkins of Oxford is well known for his discussions and his books and so on in the realm of scientific discussion. Or Philip Pullman, the novelist, expresses his opposition to the Lord Jesus in the realm of the books that he writes.

Another example from a generation back is that of the late Professor Sir Alfred Ayer of Oxford University, A.J. Ayer, who was a leading philosopher in Oxford some thirty or forty years ago and who was well known for his antagonism towards Christianity.

Let me quote to you from a short article that he wrote in The Guardian in 1979. Among religions of historical importance, there is quite a strong case for considering Christianity the worst.

Why? Because it rests on the allied doctrines of original sin and vicarious atonement which are intellectually contemptible and morally outrageous.

Well, let's consider our wrists well and truly slapped by Sir Freddie Ayer for that remark. Now, leaving the intellectual world aside, let's think of the popular atmosphere in which we live today in this country.

[10 : 55] How is the Christian faith regarded in modern Britain? In our schools, for example, or in political debate on the radio? I want to quote now from an article which appeared in April, just a few weeks ago in the Daily Mail.

And I'll read the quotation first before I tell you who has written it because when you hear who the author is, I think you'll be surprised. Christianity is under siege in this country.

Britain's national religion has never been so marginalised and derided, especially by the public institutions that should be defending it. For make no mistake, a new form of virulent secularism is sweeping through society and its target is Christianity.

Schools also are sidelining Christianity in favour of smaller religions. Our country now has a generation of pupils who know more about the Hindu festival of Diwali than about the meaning of Christmas.

Author Dr. Taj Hargey, a British Muslim Imam, Muslim cleric, but a clear-sighted one.

[12 : 17] I read the other day about a primary school in the quiet, sleepy little town of Crediton in Devonshire. where a girl, a pupil in the school, was reprimanded by her class teacher for talking about her Christian faith to another child.

How old was this child who was reprimanded by her teacher? Five years old. Five. There are forces abroad in our country that are even wanting to gag a five-year-old evangelist.

If the world hates you, know that it is hated me before it hated you. When we're Christians, when we become Christians, we leave the rhubarb patch.

We're immediately into a battlefield. We open our eyes, we look around, and we see that there are rifles pointing at us from many angles. To be a Christian is to be at peace with God, but not at peace with the world.

Well, let's see how the teaching of Jesus helped his disciples in the first century and how it continues to help Christians today. I've got two main sections.

[13 : 30] First, Jesus teaches us why the world hates him and his people, and then second, Jesus gives us real encouragements. So first, he teaches us why the world hates him and his people.

And let's notice two reasons here. First, the world hates the Lord's people because we are different. Because we're different. Look at verse 19.

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

It's such a straightforward explanation. If we were of the world, says Jesus, if we belonged to the world, the world would love us. A bee belongs to a beehive.

A fish belongs in water. An earlobe belongs to an ear. But a Christian no longer belongs to the world. The moment we submit to Christ as our king, we're removed from the sphere of the world with all its antagonism towards the Lord Jesus and we now belong to a completely new entity, the Lord's people, where we find a new life and a new identity.

[14 : 50] Look at verse 19. If you were of the world, says Jesus, if your sense of identity and belonging and comfort was all in the world, then you would have plenty of friends in the world.

As Jesus puts it, the world would love you as its own. So the world would say to me, Edward, you're one of us. Welcome, settle down here. You belong here. You're in the snug with us.

Put your feet up and relax. That's the first half of verse 19. But that's not the way it is for Christians. It's the second half of verse 19 that applies to Christians.

But because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore, the world hates you. So the Christian has been extracted from the world, chosen out of the world.

And that's why the Christian realizes that he no longer belongs in his old circles. Now, I'm not for a moment wanting to suggest that the new Christian should cut himself off from his old friends.

[15 : 51] It's far from it, because after all, you want to share the gospel with your old friends. But the new Christian knows that he's different. He has different values, different goals. He has a different master.

And this is why Simon Peter, the Apostle Peter, in his first letter recorded in the New Testament, writes to his friends as sojourners and exiles. A sojourner is somebody who just stays a short while and then moves on.

An exile is living somewhere where he doesn't belong. So what Peter means is we don't belong here. We're exiled from our homeland. But we won't be exiled forever.

Or think of Paul as well, writing to the Philippian Christians and reminding them that their real citizenship is in heaven and not in Philippi. So if we folk are Christians, yes, we're living in Glasgow, we're living in the United Kingdom, we're living in the world, but we're no longer of the world.

our identity has been fundamentally changed. We don't belong in the old way. And that, says Jesus, is why the world hates us.

[17 : 01] However, the world is not all out there because the world and its values can get into the church as well. And this is why even within the Christian church you find fierce antagonisms and difficulties and battles having to be fought.

A local church like ours, any local church that you can think of, when it's stripped back to its hard wiring, it will be seen that it either follows the Lord and his teaching in the Bible or it will follow the agenda of the world and the world's antagonism to the Lord.

Now, if you're a young person or maybe somebody not so young in years but young as a Christian, you may find that rather hard to understand. You perhaps want to ask, how can it be that a professedly Christian church can follow the world and not the Lord Jesus?

But actually, as you get to know your New Testament and your Old Testament, you find that it has always been like that. That under the umbrella of the institutional church, there has always been a mixture of those who truly belong to the Lord and follow his agenda and those who profess to belong to him but actually follow the agenda of the world.

Now, a good example is what is going on in the Church of Scotland at this very moment and this is why the Church of Scotland is so divided. Now, the presenting issue, I'm really interested in the underlying cause really, but the presenting issue is this business of civil partnerships and everything that civil partnerships stand for.

[18 : 38] Now, the world, the world, as defined by the Lord Jesus, the world has always had a pro-gay lobby. It's nothing new. In fact, I heard just the other day that apparently 19 out of the first 20 Roman emperors were active in homosexual behaviour.

Did you know that? A great surprise to me. Many of them were married as well, but this kind of behaviour was also going on. So it's not new. But in this country, since approximately the 1960s, there's been a fresh wave of pressure which has been very successful.

Very successful, right up to the point where now same-sex relationships are held up as of equal value to heterosexual marriage. And the whole country, we find, is now bowing down to this pressure like the Philistines bowing down to Dagon.

And nobody in any positions of authority out in the world dares speak against it. In the run-up to the general election, just the other day, you'll have noticed, I'm sure, that all three leaders of the three main political parties bowed the knee to the sacred cow and said how, of course, the civil partnership agenda must be upheld, even though I have no doubt that those three men were speaking against their consciences.

And some churches, 30 or 40 years ago, began to open their front door just an inch or two to this agenda. But as soon as it was opened an inch, somebody jammed their foot in the door and forced it further open.

[20 : 11] So we're now in the position by 2010 where we have not just individual churches, but whole presbyteries welcoming this particular part of the world's agenda. And that's why the worldly church will become very antagonistic towards churches that seek to stick with the Lord's agenda as he expresses it in the Bible.

That's why the Church of Scotland is divided today. Now this gay lobby problem is not the only one. It just happens to be the one that is causing a lot of trouble at the moment.

There are others, there have been others, there will be yet others in future. But I'm simply taking this as an example of how an element of the world's agenda can insinuate itself into the life of the Church.

So this means that Christians who follow the Lord Jesus and the Bible's agenda will be hated by the world out there but will also be hated by the worldly church.

So there's the first thing. The world hates the Lord's people because we're different. Now second, the world hates Christians because it does not know God and does not know the Lord Jesus.

[21 : 27] Look on to verse 21. But all these things they will do to you, that's persecutions and opposition, all these things they will do to you on account of my name because they do not know him who sent me, which is of course God the Father.

Look on to chapter 16 verse 3. And they will do these things, again putting them out of synagogues and killing them even, they will do these things because they have not known the Father nor me.

And just keep an eye, keep one eye on chapter 16 verse 3 and glance across to chapter 17 verse 3 where Jesus is praying to God the Father and he says in 17.3 this is eternal life that they know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

Did you see how these things fit together? Eternal life, teaches the Lord, is to know God the Father and his Son Jesus. But those who don't know the Father or the Lord Jesus will set themselves against the Lord's people and will hate them.

But it's not simply a question of the world hating the Lord's people. There's an ugly depth to the whole business. Look back to chapter 15 verse 23.

[22 : 46] 15-23. Whoever hates me hates my Father also. So the hatred of the world is directed against the Lord's people and against the Lord Jesus and behind him God the Father as well.

So let's try and follow the Lord Jesus' line of thought through all this. Look back to verse 21. But all these things, these persecutions and oppositions, they will do to you, that's you disciples, you Christians, but why?

On account of my name. On account of my name. In other words, they're not going to have a go at you because you're you. It's not because you've got freckles or because you like Haribo sweets or because you will go to the curling club on Saturdays.

No. They're going to make life unpleasant for you because of Jesus. Because they know that you belong to him. It's him that they object to, not you. And yet they don't know him.

They object to him, but they don't know him. Look how Jesus speaks of this in terms of his own contemporaries back in 30 AD, those who rejected him. Look at verse 22. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin.

[24 : 01] But now, now that I have been and spoken, they have no excuse for their sin. In other words, I came to them, I spoke to them, I told them the good news, I told them that they needed to repent and believe, and they rejected me.

They said, we're not going to have you as our king. Go away. Don't even think about lording it over us. But it wasn't just Jesus' words that they rejected, it was his deeds too.

Look on to verse 24. If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now, having done these works, they have seen and hated both me and my father.

So what he's saying is, they've heard my words, and they've also seen my mighty, unparalleled acts of power and grace, miracles that speak of the glory of the age to come, and yet they've rejected me because they don't know me.

So, they hate Christians because the Christians belong to Jesus, and they hate Jesus because they don't know him. Well, what does that mean?

[25 : 10] What does it mean when he says that they don't know him? It means, really, that they don't recognize him. They can't tell who he is. Jesus, says somebody back in 30 AD in Palestine, Jesus, oh yes, I know who he is.

I remember meeting him up in the main street in Nazareth a couple of years back. He's the carpenter's son, isn't he? Joseph's boy, I know him, brother of James and Joseph Junior and Simon and Jude. Mary's his mother, I know the sisters too, I know all the family.

I've known him since he was a boy in short pants, learning to use a chisel in his father's workshop. That's the way many people regarded him. He was the carpenter. Joseph and Sons, join us, 95 Main Street, Nazareth, telephone 01413335000.

That's the way they regarded him, part of that firm. Now this is just the issue back in chapter 14, verse 9. Just look back to 14, 9. Have I been with you so long, Philip, Philip my apostle and disciple, and still you don't know me?

Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. He's saying, don't you recognize that I am the only son of the only true God? So back to 1521, 1521.

[26 : 30] It's because they don't know God the Father that they will persecute you, Jesus is saying. In chapter 16, verse 3, they will do these things, they'll put you out of the synagogues, they'll even kill you because they have not known the Father nor me.

if they had known who I was, if they had recognized that I came from heaven, sent by the true and only God, of course they would have loved me and welcomed me and they would have loved you.

But it's because they don't know me that they set themselves against you. So when people attack us, when people take pot shots at us, it's not really about us, it's about Jesus.

Verse 21, these things they will do to you on account of my name. So if they spurn us in some small way, it's because they spurn him in a big way.

So the world hates Christians first because we're different and second because the world doesn't know Jesus or God the Father. Now friends, there are some great encouragements here as well and I want us to notice a few of them before we head for the tea trolleys.

[27 : 46] And we do need to see these encouragements because everything we've looked at so far is really quite daunting, isn't it? But there's much encouragement. I'd like to mention three encouragements. First, when we come up against opposition because we're Christians, let's remember that we are in the very best company.

Look again at verse 18. If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hates you. Jesus has been there long before we ever have.

Just imagine for a moment the kind of scene that could just happen in this country in a few years' time. Imagine that our pastor, our minister, Willie Phillip, has been sent to prison.

Could happen. Imagine that that has happened because he has dared, I'm going to be a little bit ironic here, he has dared to contravene the enlightened laws of the United Kingdom.

For example, he's dared to say that Christianity is true, the gospel is true, and other religions are false. What a thing to say from a pulpit. Or he's dared to say that marriage is a fine institution which needs to be upheld.

[29 : 01] How dare he fly in the face of our modern enlightened legislation? Anyway, there he is, sent to prison for a month with nothing but bread and water, until he apologises to the nation for his dastardly ill-conceived behaviour.

Not that he would ever apologise. And as he sits there in his prison cell, he will then think of the Lord Jesus, and he'll think of John 15, 18, and he will be able to say to the Lord, Lord, you have been through something much worse than this.

I'm on bread and water for a month, but you were crucified for me. It will be a comfort to him to know that the world has hated the Lord Jesus before ever it hated him.

And of course, the truth is that fierce persecution, much worse than a month in prison, even death, are the lot of Christians in many countries today. It will be a great comfort to our brothers and sisters in many countries who are in prison, who are on bread and water for more than a month.

A great comfort to them to think of John 15, verse 18. So the persecuted Christian is in the very best company. Then second, from verse 19, when we are hated and opposed, it shows that we really are Christians.

[30 : 28] Christians. Look at these words again from verse 19. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. But because you are not of the world, that is why the world hates you.

Now this verse will be a great comfort to us when people have a go at us for being Christians. I think it may bring special comfort to those who are children and teenagers, those who are still at school at the moment.

because when you are at that stage in life, it is harder to cope with the opposition. When you are older, you are out at work, or perhaps you have moved on to further studies, university, or so on, it is a bit easier.

There is less pressure on you to conform. You can spread your wings a little bit more easily. But when you are still at school, you are enclosed somehow with your peers. It is harder to get away from them.

So when they mock you for being a Christian, you can feel very lonely. And I isolated, you don't know what to say. You perhaps haven't quite learned yet how to speak about your faith to your classmates.

[31 : 30] But you can be sure of this, that when they do say things to you and taunt you for belonging to the Lord or for being a Christian, it is clear proof that you are a Christian. That is the force of verse 19.

If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. But the world hates you because you are not of the world. So when somebody says to you, you are a Christian, are you?

What an extraordinary thing. That tells you who you really belong to. Now a third and final encouragement. When we do come up against opposition, we know that Jesus has forewarned us of it 2,000 years ago and therefore it will never come to us as a real surprise.

Just look again at these first four verses of chapter 16. I have 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 is offering 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.

- [32 : 48] So you won't be taken by surprise. Now I think this aspect of it may be of special comfort to the older Christians here. If you were growing up in the 1930s or 40s or 50s, I imagine you'll look back to your childhood and you'll remember what a different world it was back then.

In some ways it was harder. Rickets, little children with skinny bandy legs, TB, polio, a full set of false teeth for your 21st birthday.

It was often like that. But, harder in some ways, but as far as the gospel and the church were concerned, it was a safer and more secure world. Isn't that right?

Compared with life today, the Bible was honoured relatively. Marriage was honoured. Religious education in school meant the Bible. Christian ministers were highly respected.

And in society at large, there was a great sense of value attached to honesty, good manners, loyalty, hard work, and a spirit of service. And sometimes, you wish you could turn the clock back 50 or 60 years.

- [34 : 01] Isn't that right? However, the Lord Jesus has always known that times of persecution would characterise most societies for most of the time.

And that's what he's saying here in chapter 16, verse 4. In other words, the kind of atmosphere that we are living in today is the normal thing. The message of verse 4 is that when we feel the sharp edge of the world's hatred, we've been forewarned.

So our response is shown to us in verse 1. We don't fall away. We keep going joyfully. We're forearmed. This is still the age of the gospel, friends. Still the age of the gospel.

The gospel promises are as true today and as powerful today as they were back in 1950. So you older ones, don't be disheartened. We live in an age of grace.

People are still turning to the Lord and it's a great joy to us. So the world hates Jesus because it doesn't want his rule.

- [35 : 07] The world hates God the Father because it doesn't know him and the world will hate Christians. So how should Christians respond?

Should the world's hatred for us be met by our hatred of the world? Should we as it were sharpen our cutlasses and go at the world full tilt and then gloat in triumph when we draw blood?

Let's allow Jesus himself to teach us how to respond. The world hates him and the world hates his followers and the world hates his father.

But God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

you and I, if we're Christians, we once belonged to the world but we were rescued from it. Our task then is to follow Jesus' example and to lay out our lives in the service of the world.

- [36 : 22] Let us pray. our Lord Jesus, how kind it is of you to have taught your disciples like this so clearly and so lovingly.

And your words live today and teach us today and we are so grateful to you for them. We pray that your message will sink into our hearts deeply, that you'll equip us and arm us not to be surprised by the antagonism of non-Christian society to you and to the gospel and indeed to us, but we pray that you'll help us to love the world and to give ourselves in gospel service to it.

We pray that this church may continue to be a place where the gospel is lovingly and clearly preached and where people come to bow the knee to you and to acknowledge you as their true king.

We ask it for your name's sake. Amen.