

What Should We Expect from the World?

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- [0 : 01] Well, we're going to turn to our Bibles. Philip Copeland is leading us through these center chapters of John's Gospel and we're coming this evening to John chapter 15 at verse 18. So we're going to pick up there and read through into the first little section of chapter 16. Jesus in the upper room, just before his betrayal, teaching his innermost circle of disciples about what is to come in his own death, through his death, and for their own lives and for their own witness. And their critical part in bringing the Gospel message to the church all through the ages. So John chapter 15 at verse 18 then, Jesus said, If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. But because you are not of the world, but I choose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. 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.
- [1 : 26] 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. 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.
- [2 : 33] It 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've said these things to you that when their hour comes, you may remember that I told them to you. Amen. Amen. And may God bless to us his word. Well, friends, please do have your Bibles open to that passage we had read in John's Gospel. Come with me now, please, to the year 177 AD to Imperial Gaul, the area today that we know as Lyon in France. Gaul is currently under Roman rule. I just picture the whole place is in serious uproar. Soldiers are on the rampage. They're searching around, gathering up Christians and dragging them before the magistrates for intense interrogation.
- [3 : 43] Many people have already denied their faith, denied that Jesus is Lord. But some are standing firm. One man called Sanctus is brought in.

They ask him, what is your name? And he replies, I am a Christian. They ask, where are you from? And he replies, I am a Christian.

They ask, are you slave or free? He says, I am a Christian. They take red hot sheets of brass metal and start to apply them to various different bits of his body.

They then take him out and alongside other believers, throw him into the local amphitheater and they set wild beasts upon him. He survives.

But then he is dragged out into the public square. And at the request of the local people, Sanctus is stripped naked and he is strapped to a red hot iron chair.

[4 : 44] Again and again, all that he will say until he dies are the words, I am a Christian. What do you expect from the Christian life here today?

Health, wealth, prosperity? Well, our passage this evening contains a very sobering but also strengthening lesson for us.

Because Jesus is teaching his disciples what to expect from the world. Remember at this point in John's gospel, Jesus has been teaching his 11 disciples, soon to be apostles, all about what life will be like once he's left them and ascended back to the Father in glory.

Remember this scene takes place on the night before the cross. And over the next 24 hours, Jesus is going to sovereignly complete the work that his Father sent him here to do.

Which was to willingly lay down his life as the Lamb of God, the perfect sacrifice of atonement, to save people like you and me from our sin. That will happen on a Friday and this scene takes place the night before on the Thursday.

[5 : 55] And it's a scene very much like a scene from a war movie where the commanding officer is speaking to his troops in order to prepare them for their mission. For Jesus will soon send out these 11 men into the world to be his witnesses.

His messengers. And remember, he will not send them out to do this on their own. They will be fully equipped and enabled for their task. Because Jesus has just said in chapter 14 that he will send his spirit to live in them permanently.

And when the spirit is in them, he will bring these disciples into union with Christ. And at the start of chapter 15, Jesus uses an illustration to show what this union will be like.

He says, we will be united together just in the same way as a vine is united to its branches. This union has come about completely 100% by God's grace.

You do not deserve such a thing. But Jesus also says that the disciples have a great responsibility of doing all that they can to abide in him. Remain in him.

[7 : 00] That comes up from verse 1 to 17 again and again and again and again. And Jesus says, when they abide in him, they will bear much fruit. That is, Christ's life will start to show itself in their behavior and in their character.

And it will also mean that the disciples will be effective in evangelism. The church will grow. God's vine will spread throughout the earth. And of course, you'll remember that abiding in Christ involves three things that go hand in hand together.

Firstly, abiding in Christ means believing his word. 15 verse 7. And believing in his word is not just paying lip service to Jesus, saying I'm faithful to Jesus.

No, believing in his word is about obedience to his commands. Verse 10. And what is Jesus' command? Well, in verse 12, he sums up all of his commands into one.

This is my command, that you love one another as I have loved you. Now, at this point in the discourse, the disciples might have been sitting there thinking, well, this is going to be a prosperous picnic.

[8 : 07] And so now Jesus gives them a sobering lesson that that will not be the case. Jesus tells them what to expect behind enemy lines. And I'd like us to look at this passage under three questions.

Question one is this. What treatment should we expect from the world? What treatment should we expect from the world? And Jesus says to his disciples, don't be surprised if the world hates you in the same way that it has hated me.

Please look at verse 18. If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before you. And verse 20. Remember the word I said to you.

A servant is not greater than his master. If they, the world, persecuted me, they will also persecute you. Jesus said those words, a servant is not greater than his master, back in chapter 13.

And as you'll know, in that chapter, Jesus carries out a shocking act of humility, washing his disciples' feet. And in those days, that was a disgusting job that only the lowest of servants would carry out.

[9 : 14] And Jesus goes on to say there, you servants are not greater than me, the master. Therefore, what I have just done for you, in serving you with great humility, you must do for one another.

In other words, if you're to be my disciple, if you're to follow me, the master, then you must be willing to follow my pattern of ministry in being a lowly, humble servant.

And here in chapter 15, Jesus uses the same phrase to make the same point, except this time he's saying, if you want to be my disciples, if you want to follow me, the master, then again, you must be willing to go down my pattern of ministry in being a lowly, humble sufferer, persevering through the world's persecution.

It hated me, so do not be surprised if the world hates you. But exactly whom does Jesus have in mind here where he says the world? Well, the world in John's gospel stands for all those who try to live in God's world without honoring him.

Human society is organized without reference to God. Mankind doing his own thing, living in rebellion against its maker. Or we might simply call it non-Christian society.

[10 : 27] That is the world. Now, let me just put a caveat in here. Jesus is not teaching his disciples that everyone who is not a Christian hates him with equal ferocity.

Many people who are not Christians, as you know, tolerate the activities of Christians and treat us as no more than a bit weird. I've got non-Christian friends, and I hope you've got non-Christian friends, who think that of you.

They know you're Christian, but they don't hate you. They think you're a bit odd. But that's about it. They're still happy to be friends with you. So Jesus is not suggesting that everyone who is not a Christian is walking about constantly seething with rage against him and his disciples.

Rather, what Jesus is saying here is that non-Christian society, as a whole, will ultimately reject him as their king, and they will reject his people. They will say, we will not have you as our king, Jesus.

We will rule ourselves. We refuse to surrender to you. And we don't want you as our saviour either, because frankly, we do not need the saviour, because we don't think we've done anything wrong. So when Jesus speaks about the world, that is whom he's referring to here.

[11 : 35] And just look at who is clearly part of the world. 16 verse 2. They will put you out of the synagogue. Whom is he speaking about here?

Answer. Unbelieving Israel. Jesus is saying to his disciples that the majority of the people whom he has ministered to throughout John's gospel are not true Jews at all.

In fact, they're of the world. Gentiles at heart. If they were true Jews, then they would bow the knee to Christ and become Christians. But they hated Christ, and so they are of the world.

It doesn't matter their ethnic background. They are strangers and aliens to the true people of God. And of course, the same principle applies today, doesn't it? All Jews who reject Christ are actually of the world.

I just want to raise this point because I'm actually alarmed when I hear of evangelical Christians pouring their time, talents, and money into helping the modern state of Israel. Because somehow they think that means helping the kingdom of God.

[12 : 36] I can't possibly see how that could be the case, given Jesus' words here. If someone rejects Christ, they're not part of the kingdom, but they're enemies. They're part of the world. So Jesus tells his disciples, you've seen how they treated me.

Well, get ready, for they will treat you in the same way. Now, of course, as the end of verse 20 says, some members of the world believed in Jesus' words when he ministered to them.

And so that will also be true of the apostles' ministry as well. Some members of the world will respond to the apostles' teaching by the obedience of faith, surrendering their lives to Jesus, believing that he is the Christ, the Son of God.

And those who do so well like that swap sides in this war. But it's also true that the majority of people to whom Jesus ministered hated him.

Hated him. That theme runs all the way through John's gospel. Let me just take you on a whistle-stop tour, stopping down at a few places, of the hatred for Jesus and John.

[13 : 39] Listen to this. In chapter 1, we're told that Jesus was in the world, and the world was made through him. Yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.

In John 5, after Jesus had just healed a man who'd been paralyzed for decades, listen to how the world responds.

And this is why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. But Jesus answered them, My father is working until now, and I am working. This is why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was even calling God his own father, making himself equal to God.

In John 8, we read that the Jews answered Jesus, Are we not right in saying that you're a Samaritan, and you have a demon? And at the end of that same chapter, we're told that the Jews picked up stones to throw at him.

But of course, Jesus hid himself and went out from the temple. And there are plenty more references like that, but that's just some of the highlights for the hatred that the world has for our master, the one that we follow.

[14 : 51] And when we look at these references in context, when you go by, and I really recommend you do that, run through John and look at the hatred that Jesus faces, you will see how unreasonable and irrational the hatred is.

Just think about all that Jesus did. Did Jesus ever harm anyone? No. In fact, he treated others with enormous dignity and care. Jesus never did anything wrong.

He only did what was right. He was full of compassion and love for people who didn't deserve it. He never lied. He always spoke the truth. He was a man of total integrity.

He served others perfectly. He was so kind and generous. He healed those who thought they were never going to be healed ever again. And yet, the world treated him as though he was evil incarnate.

Irrational. Unreasonable. In fact, the more the world encountered Jesus' goodness, the more the world hated him and wanted to destroy him.

[15 : 54] We see the same thing today, don't we, when we see the world speaking out against issues that are clearly bad for humanity.

And how does the world respond to the disciples of Jesus? With pure hatred. Think of speaking out against all the transgender nonsense that's damaging and destroying children. And the evidence is clear.

Science is on our side. How does the world respond? With pure hatred. It's exactly what Jesus faced from the Jews. And this is what Jesus says in verse 25.

They hated me without a cause. Without a cause. Jesus is actually quoting King David there. A key figure in the scriptures that the Jews claimed to know and believe. How tragically ironic is that?

The very scriptures that the Jews were privileged to have predicted perfectly the way that they would treat King David's greater son when he arrived centuries later. And they hated him without a cause.

[16 : 54] And of course we see the world's hatred of Jesus climaxed in chapters 18 and 19 of John's Gospel when the world ultimately rejects him. Both Jews and Gentiles point him forward to the cross.

And he's crucified. And he says to his disciples don't be surprised if the world treats you in exactly the same way. Be ready for it. They are going to put me to death.

And they will do the same to you. And Jesus' message is the same for all disciples today. It's the same message for all of us. And for all those in the generations to come.

If we stand up for Christ and unashamedly live for him in the non-Christian society that surrounds us, well yes, people may well turn and swap sides and surrender to Christ.

But we must also be prepared to face hostility for doing that. Friends may despise and forsake you. Work colleagues may verbally rip us to shreds in staff rooms.

[18 : 00] The government may try and stop us raising our kids in the instruction and the admonition of the Lord. Our employers may hand us our P45 and send us on our way because we refuse to keep our faith in Christ a private matter.

Secondary schools may shut the doors to SU groups. Christian unions may be forced to start meeting up outside of university campuses due to oppressive protests from LGBTQ groups.

Christian street preachers may be wrongfully arrested for proclaiming the gospel. All of these things may happen and they're already happening, aren't they? They shouldn't surprise us.

They shouldn't surprise us. This is part and parcel of being a disciple of the crucified Lord. And I think it's safe to say that most of us today won't find ourselves in the coming week and the awful position that Sanctus was in back in 177 AD.

Although, given the UK's current trajectory, I can't with all confidence say that violent persecution will never happen to any of us in the future. Do you ever think about this?

[19 : 14] Do you ever wonder what it would be like to trust in the Lord Jesus in 20 years' time? I think about that. I think about my son. My son is three years old. What will it be like when he is 33?

What will it be like when I'm in my 50s? Will churches be able to meet in buildings like this? Can we have public worship together? Will we have buildings?

Will we have assets? If the UK carries on on the current trajectory that it's on, I think it's a very fair comment to say that it's going to be much, much harder for all of us in the future.

But that should not surprise us. Now just remember that the freedom we've had in this country over the past few centuries or so to worship Christ without fear of persecution or physical oppression, it's not normal in the history of the church.

Just read church history and you'll see that that is the case. And things could rapidly shift overnight. So that is a sobering word from the Lord Jesus and it is sobering.

[20 : 20] What should we expect from the world? Jesus says to his disciples, don't be surprised if the world hates you. Here's the second question this evening. Why will the world treat us this way?

Why will the world respond like this? Well there are many reasons but let me just pick out two that Jesus mentions here. The first reason is this. The first reason that the world hates us is because the world only loves its own.

Please look at verse 19. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. But I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

So why does the world hate Jesus' disciples? Answer, because Jesus' disciples are not of the world. Jesus has chosen them and rescued them out of the world. There's been a transfer if you like, as if the coach of a top level club has bought us from some useless, utterly useless lower league club to play for his team.

And from now on we're playing against our old team. And we cannot expect our old teammates to like this nor to understand our transfer. I think I've told you before about a friend of mine, I've lost touch with her, I knew her quite a few years ago, maybe 15 years ago or so.

[21 : 36] She came to profess Christ as Lord at a Christian camp one summer when she was a teenager. And when she came home to our non-Christian family, they were deeply concerned by what she'd done.

And months went on and as the months went on, they could see a visible change in their daughter. And one night her non-Christian mum sat her down and said, why on earth can't you just be like any normal teenager?

Why can't you come in plastered or high? I'd much rather that than you living out all this Christian nonsense. her mum saw the transfer, saw the change.

Her daughter was no longer in the world, but in Christ. And that is why she hated her daughter for doing this.

So disciples, spiritually speaking, we are now in the true vine. We are in Christ, united to him through the Spirit. The presence of the triune God has taken up permanent residence in us. And so as the life of the vine flows into the branches and transforms us and makes us more into the likeness of the perfect human being, it will become more and more apparent to the world around us that we are not of it.

[22 : 54] And hence, the reason that people will be growing in hatred against us. The Apostle Paul says in his letter to Timothy, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

The second reason why the world hates us is because the world hates being convicted of sin. Please look at verse 22. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin.

Whoever hates me hates my Father also. If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now that they have seen and hated both me and my Father.

Jesus is not saying here that men would have been totally innocent if he had not come into the world to perform miracles or signs, as John calls them. That is an absurd idea. We know from earlier in John that the world was already sinful and already under condemnation before Jesus entered into it.

Jesus is not the cause of the world's sin. Rather, Jesus is saying here that with him coming into the world to reveal the Father, the world is robbed for all of its excuse for its sin.

[24 : 09] And the sin that Jesus is speaking of here isn't just any old sin. He's speaking about the specific sin of rejecting God's revelation as he reveals himself most spectacularly and explicit in Jesus Christ.

For the world rejects this revelation of God and the rejection turns to persecution and hatred. Just listen to Don Carson on this point. Ever since the fall, the world has been sinning against God.

But not until the coming of Jesus Christ, the perfect revelation of God, did the world ever sin against such light. As John 3 says, this is the verdict.

Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

So clear, so pure, so brilliant is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ that the world is robbed of all excuse when it confronts him. And not only does Jesus expose sin, he also shows that he is clearly the only remedy for sin.

[25 : 23] What excuse and hope can there be for those who turn away from such a light as this? The world confronts Jesus and either by God's grace turns from its sin to trust in him or else it is full of hatred for being exposed for all of the grimy muck and rebellion in their hearts.

And to a degree, we Christians today will evoke the same two reactions. For we do not present ourselves when we reach out as a church but we present Christ.

And friends, as we abide in Christ, the light of Christ will be mirrored through us into the dark world exposing its venom and thus earning either new converts who are convicted and turn to him and accept him as saviour or we will receive the world's implacable hatred so as we live for Christ and share him with the unbelieving society that surrounds us we will find that Christ's light of revelation will shine into people's hearts to expose sin.

Some may repent but others may totally hate us and it might kick off into violent persecution. So that is why the world will hate us because we are not of the world and we are all about reflecting the light of Christ into their hearts and that will expose sin and it could kick up hatred as a result.

Well let's look at our third and final question. How should we respond to the world's hatred then given all that and I've got three short sub points here and this is where we find Jesus giving us strength to face the world's hatred.

[27 : 13] Here we go. Firstly, how should we respond to the world's hatred? Answer, keep on witnessing with the help of the helper. Please look at verse 26.

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 in face of the world's hostility, Jesus wants his disciples to keep on witnessing. He wants his church to keep on proclaiming, keep on speaking that he is the way, the truth and the life and there is no other.

And as the church keeps on speaking, the church will not be left alone to do that task. They will be helped by the helper, the Holy Spirit. He will give them the boldness that they need.

And in fact, these 11 unique men and we're not them and I'll touch more on this next week. We are not the apostles today. And so there is a difference between us and them. We'll come to that next week.

[28 : 18] But if you look at these men and look at when the Spirit came upon them at Pentecost, all the way through the book of Acts, time and time and time again, they were given the boldness that they needed to keep proclaiming by the Holy Spirit in the face of growing hatred from the world.

And friends, the same helper lives in us and he will continue to help us today as the church we will not be left to drum up courage within ourselves and our own strength.

We must look to the Spirit to help us and give us the courage that we need as a church. So that's the first thing we're to do in the face of this hatred. Keep on witnessing with the help of the helper.

The second thing we're to do in face of the world's hatred is to keep in mind who is really in charge. Please look at 16 verse 4. I've said these things to you that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you.

So what is Jesus doing here? Well I take it he's reminding his disciples that he is in utter sovereign control of even the opposition that they will face. Even when the time comes for them to face martyrdom Jesus will still be in control.

[29 : 36] Just notice the term that Jesus uses there to describe the time when his disciples may well face their darkest hour. It's that phrase the hour their hour look at it their hour.

Now there are many sub-themes that run through John's gospel and the hour is one of them. From chapter 2 onwards John the apostle tells us about a particular hour that Jesus will face and as you read through the gospels from chapter 2 onwards again and again this little phrase pops up that says his hour had not yet come yet.

His hour had not yet come until you reach chapter 13 verse 1. Please look at chapter 13 verse 1. Now before the feast of the Passover when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father having loved his own who were in the world he loved them to the end.

Flick back over to chapter 16 please. The hour in John is shorthand for the time when Jesus would suffer and die on the cross. This hour is not a random time.

It doesn't come about by accident at all. From that verse that we've just read in 13 verse 1 it's clear that the hour of Jesus' passion is all part of God's carefully sovereign plan of salvation brought about by God's sovereign control.

[31 : 01] So I take it Jesus is saying in 16 verse 4 that when the disciples face martyrdom when they face their hour then it's just like his hour totally under the sovereign control of the living God the Almighty.

In other words Jesus is speaking incredibly strengthening and reassuring words to his troubled troops. He's telling them that even if they're to be martyred their deaths will not happen outwith God's sovereign plan and purpose.

And when Jesus' hour came upon him when he died on the cross it looked like the world had won. It looked like the world had the upper hand. It looked like the world was in charge but in reality the world wasn't in charge.

Again if you read on through John read into chapter 18 and 19 you will see clearly that Jesus is in sovereign control of everything that's happening to him. And the same truth applies to the deaths of any of Jesus' disciples.

When the world puts a disciple of Christ to death then it looks like the world has the upper hand but Jesus says in reality that is nonsense. The people of the world can only do what God has predestined and planned.

[32 : 18] And all those who die for Christ they will share in his glory. They too will be raised in power just like Jesus was. Christ's great victory on the last day they will get a share in that.

They will rule with Christ for all eternity. The vision that we have that Willie read at the beginning of his service in the book of Revelation declares that to be the case. So the disciples must keep this in mind.

Keep in mind who really is in charge. And friends if we ever find ourselves in that awful situation that Sanctus found himself in in 177 AD we must remember the Lord is on the throne.

He is in charge. And I am a Christian. We must stand firm. The last thing that we must do in the face of opposition is that we must keep on abiding in Christ.

And really I'm getting this from the fact that when you read chapter 15 and 16 together it seems clear that gospel fruit bearing happens as we face the world's hatred together.

[33 : 29] So when we face the world's hatred let's ensure that we spur each other on to keep believing in Christ's word to keep obeying his commandments which means keeping on loving each other as he's loved us.

Friends suffering is the context in which much fruit bearing really takes place. That is what Jesus is saying here when we read chapter 15 and 16 together as a whole I think I take it that the world's hatred is just another thing that God the Father uses to prune us as 15 verse 2 says so that we burst with fruit as a church.

And again you only have to look through church history to see this is true. When the world has raged and ravaged the church of Jesus Christ what is the result? Well again and again it has been that the church has grown and grown and grown.

Just think about that our enemies the enemies of the gospel the world around us when they persecute us they do not realize that actually they're serving to bring glory to Christ because they're making us bear more fruit to become more like him and they're making us grow and mature and so bring glory to our Father's name.

Isn't that wonderful? And so friends we must store up these sobering and yet strengthening words of our master so that we are ready so that we are ready.

[34 : 52] As we close let me recap what treatment should we expect from the world? Well Jesus says don't be surprised if the world hates you and if it does hate you don't fall away be prepared.

Why will the world treat us this way? Well answer because the world only loves its own and the world hates its sin being exposed. how should we respond to the world's hatred?

Well those three ways keep witnessing church with the help of the helper keep in mind who is really in charge it's not the world looks like it's the world but it's really not and keep on abiding in Christ together stand firm well let's close our eyes and bow our heads and we'll pray in response to God's word and why don't in the quiet you just take a moment to respond to God's word in your own heart and then I'll pray for us.

Oh sovereign Lord God almighty we praise you that you've shown us great grace in choosing us to be part of your vine we marvel at the way in which you've redeemed us by Jesus precious blood and have brought us into union with him through the Holy Spirit Lord we are weak we know that by nature we are cowardly so please help us help us to take these sobering words of Jesus very seriously help us to be ever ready to face hatred from the world and we pray that if and when this hatred does come upon us as a church and as individuals we ask that you will help us to keep on witnessing with the help of the helper we we cannot do this in our own strength not at all we pray that you help us to keep in mind that you are the one who is really in charge despite how things might appear and we pray that you will help us to not fall away but to keep on abiding in Christ together our risen champion and our rock of refuge help us to stand firm in him we pray this in

Jesus precious name amen