

John 15:18-16:4 – The World Hates You

Intro

- Regarding the title of this morning's sermon:
 - o It's not exactly *Your Best Life Now* (Joel Osteen), *8 Steps to Create the Life You Want* (Creflo Dollar) or *How to Be Rich & Have Everything You Ever Wanted* (Robert Tilton).
 - o It's better than those because it comes with the authority of Jesus himself and helps us live a godly life in the real world rather than promoting greed-fueled fantasies.
 - It is one of the things Jesus told his disciples in his farewell address:
 - It is something he wanted us to know as we live in this time when he is not visibly, physically present.

- The idea that true followers of Jesus can enjoy a constantly cushy & carefree life here and now is completely out of line with the teachings of Jesus and with the experience of many of our faithful brothers and sisters down through history.
 - o E.g. Roman Historian Tacitus describes Emperor Nero's treatment of Christians (c. 64 AD – Peter & Paul were probably killed during this persecution):

First, Nero had self-acknowledged Christians arrested. Then, on their information, large numbers of others were condemned – not so much for incendiarism as for their anti-social tendencies. Their deaths were made farcical. Dressed in wild animals' skins, they were torn to pieces by dogs, or crucified, or made into torches to be ignited after dark as substitutes for daylight. Nero provided his Gardens for the spectacle, and exhibited displays at the Circus...Despite their guilt as Christians, and the ruthless punishment it deserved, the victims were pitied. For it was felt that they were being sacrificed to one man's brutality rather than to the national interest.

- o Excerpts from a letter from Governor Pliny the Younger to Emperor Trajan (112 AD).

... in the case of those who were denounced to me as Christians, I have observed the following procedure: I interrogated these as to whether they were Christians; those who confessed I interrogated a second and a third time, threatening them with punishment; those who persisted I ordered executed. For I had no doubt that, whatever the nature of their creed, stubbornness and inflexible obstinacy surely deserve to be punished....

...Those who denied that they were or had been Christians, when they invoked the gods in words dictated by me, offered prayer with incense and wine to your image, which I had ordered to be brought for this purpose together with statues of the gods, and moreover cursed Christ--none of which those who are really Christians, it is said, can be forced to do--these I thought should be discharged....

...They asserted...that the sum and substance of their fault or error had been that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god, and to bind themselves by oath, not to some crime, but not to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, not

falsify their trust, nor to refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so. When this was over, it was their custom to depart and to assemble again to partake of food--but ordinary and innocent food...

...I judged it all the more necessary to find out what the truth was by torturing two female slaves who were called deaconesses. But I discovered nothing else but depraved, excessive superstition...the contagion of this superstition has spread not only to the cities but also to the villages and farms. But it seems possible to check and cure it...

(18-20) The Expectation of Hatred

- (18-19) Definition of *the world* in this context:
 - o It is the value system corrupted by sin and influenced by Satan.
 - Satan is called: the god of this age, the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the prince of this world, the spirit who is now at work in the disobedient, etc.
 - It is how the average person thinks & acts and expects others to think & act.
 - o It is human society in general (no matter what nation or people group) that has chosen to pursue something other than a right relationship with God.
 - That *something* can be other religions or pure reason or just pleasure in the form of instant gratification.
 - 1 John 2:16 describes it as the love and pursuit of what feels good, looks attractive, and brings a sense of pride in accomplishment or possession.

- Hatred from the world can take a variety of forms.
 - o Condescension & Contempt: people look down on you & think of you as (at best) a well-meaning but sadly ignorant person who believes in fairytales and pie in the sky.
 - o Name-calling & False Accusations: People tell you to your face, over the internet, and/or through the entertainment & news media that Christians are evil.
 - We are portrayed as hypocrites, prudes, bigots, intolerant hate-mongers, the cause of much violence in the world, etc.
 - Sometimes these accusations *are* sadly true of those who claim to be Christians (and we'll talk about that a little more later), but we're talking here about false accusations.
 - o Legal Opposition: People use the political & judicial systems to try to force Christians into behavior that is displeasing to God.
 - Could be requiring something that would be disobedience to God or forbidding something that we must do as faithful followers of Jesus.
 - Examples:
 - Sanhedrin command apostles to stop teaching in the name of Jesus
 - Roman Christians commanded to worship Caesar as a god to prove they are loyal subjects of the Empire.
 - o Violent Persecution: People deprive you of your job, your home, your possessions, your place in society, your freedom, and even your life.

- When we as followers of Jesus experience this kind of hatred, it should not surprise us.
 - o People have a tendency to fear and hate people who are different than them, and if you are truly a follower of Jesus, you are very different from those who are not.
 - You are no longer a part of the world system, and you will not act like you are because of your new nature and the indwelling Holy Spirit
 - You are not a citizen of the kingdom of darkness but of the kingdom of God.
 - The kingdom of God is not yet fully established here on earth. That day *is* coming, but until then you are in hostile territory.
 - We live in a world run by the enemies of our true home country.
 - o (20) How did people respond to Jesus' ministry?
 - A few believed in him.
 - Some saw him as a means of getting stuff but left in disgust when he made it clear that faith in him is the only way to be right with God.
 - Most of the religious leaders (the most respected & influential people of that society) publicly argued with him, disputed his claims, tried to make him look foolish, and even accused him of being demon possessed.
 - Judas Iscariot & the religious leaders plotted to kill him...and succeeded!
 - Pontius Pilate, the provincial official in charge of justice, gave legal approval for the execution and dispatched government soldiers to carry it out.
 - o Since that is how our Lord was treated, we should not be shocked when following him leads to some fruit and quite a bit of contempt, hatred, and opposition.

(21-25) The Reason for Hatred

- (21) The bottom line of why the world hates followers of Jesus is that it does not know God and does not want to acknowledge him.
 - o If people believe in God at all, they want the "indulgent grandfather god" or "wish granting genie god"
 - He winks at their sins, says "boys will be boys," and spoils them by giving them all the good things they ask for.
 - He lets them into heaven without expecting anything out of them besides maybe vague good intentions.
 - o This is not the God of the Bible, the God who is our Father through faith in Jesus Christ, the God we proclaim...the God that is hated & rejected by the world.
- (22-24) By offering to provide forgiveness of sins through faith in himself, Jesus has made it very clear that sin results in guilt before God that must be taken care of.
 - o There is no excuse for sin; it cannot be brushed off as "no big deal."
 - o Jesus backed up this message with mighty works, proving that he is who he claims to be: God the Son, the Word of God Himself.
 - o Hatred for that message shows hatred for God.

- Basically, people hate Jesus and his true followers because his message points out our sin and guilt before God.
 - We are told that sin excludes us from God’s Kingdom (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).
 - Some of the things that God’s Word calls *sin* are seen by the world as a normal part of human behavior (or at least as no big deal in small doses):
 - Sex outside of marriage
 - Homosexual acts
 - Greed (the love of money)
 - Getting drunk
 - Being insulting or slanderous
- (25) Jesus points out that this hatred is really an irrational hatred.
 - It is the kind of “hatred without cause” described in the Messianic Psalms.
 - Yes, his message points out the sin and guilt of all people, but it also offers salvation as a free gift to all people (e.g. 1 Corinthians 6:11, Romans 3:23-25a).
 - Getting angry about that is like hating the doctor who tells you that you have stage 4 cancer, but he can cure it.
 - Irrational or not, the contempt is there. In their pride, people get hung up on the guilt and either deny it or think they can take care of it themselves.

(26-4) The Response to Hatred (Why does Jesus tell us this?)

- (26-27) Jesus encourages his followers to rely on the Holy Spirit to continue in the truth.
 - For the 11 faithful disciples that meant the Holy Spirit would help them remember, write down, and proclaim what they had personally seen and heard.
 - For us (who are not eyewitnesses but have his inspired Word) that means having boldness to live and share the Word of God as he guides and enables.
 - That includes taking the opportunities to show Christlike love to those in need; good deeds that bring glory to God (Matthew 5:13-16)
 - That includes refusing to participate in or approve of things that the Bible calls sin: don’t be flavorless salt or a hidden lamp.
 - That includes taking opportunities to share the good news of salvation (even though it means starting with the bad news that we need to be saved).
- (1) The main reason Jesus told his followers about what was coming (the world’s hatred and the Holy Spirit’s enablement) was so that we would not become discouraged.
 - We should not be shocked, outraged, discouraged, or depressed when something happens that can be seen as hatred toward Jesus, his teachings, or his followers.
 - Jesus told us that would be the normal experience of living as his followers in this world (*cf.* 1 Peter 4:12 – read 1 Peter this week / sermon series 2019).
 - The US is not exempt from this just because various factors in our history have made it more rare (or less open) than in many other times and places.

- We should not allow the hatred of the world (however it is expressed) to scare us away from being faithful followers of Jesus.
 - Along with the devil and our own sinful desires, the world is a source of temptation to sin:
 - The desire to fit in. To be one of the guys rather than an outsider.
 - The ease of accepting the sinful values that we hear all day long in entertainment, social media, political commentary, news, etc.
 - Accepting the “educated” position that the universe is the product of time and chance.
 - Rejecting God’s standards for sexual purity.
 - Deciding to “fight fire with fire” and engage in the mudslinging, insults, and mockery that characterize public debate.
 - Romans 12:2 – Let your thoughts, values, desires, and the actions that flow out of them be shaped by God’s will, not molded by this world.

- (2-3) Jesus foretells that there will be times of intense persecution.
 - There will be times when those claiming to be religious will think themselves good and godly because of their opposition to Jesus’ faithful followers.
 - There will be times when being a follower of Jesus results in exclusion from society and even death.

- (4a) Jesus wants his followers to remember that when they face hatred and opposition that this was not unexpected/unplanned...God’s plan is not going off the rails.
 - If people dislike us or try to oppose us for what we believe, do, and proclaim from God’s Word in the power of the Holy Spirit, we should take that as a good sign.
 - Caution: society’s contempt/opposition is only a good sign if it is because we are faithfully living as followers of Jesus and proclaiming the truth in love. See 1 Peter:
 - 2:11-12 – We must live lives of moral integrity so that accusations of being evildoers fall flat for anyone who actually knows us.
 - 3:14-15 – In the face of mistreatment, the truth of the Gospel must be spoken with gentleness & respect, not outrage & mockery
 - 4:15-16 – It is not God honoring if your suffering is self-inflicted because you were doing evil or even just being an annoying busybody.
 - Far from reacting with compromise, outrage, or a pity party when we feel mistreated or disrespected for our faith, we are supposed to rejoice.
 - The longest blessing in the beatitudes is for those who face hatred because of Jesus & his righteousness (Matthew 5:10-12).
 - When the disciples first faced legal opposition that turned into physical punishment, they were excited, honored, and determined to carry on (Acts 5:40-42)

Conclusion & Applications

- Next week we are going to continue through this passage (I stopped practically in the middle of a paragraph) and Jesus is going to explain several things that should keep us from discouragement when faced with hatred or opposition. Some applications for now:

- The Good News of salvation starts with the bad news that we need to be saved from the guilt and consequences of our sin: rather than taking offense, take the free gift of salvation!

- Don't let opposition to God and his people (whether experienced personally or merely heard about) turn you into a complaining, mopey, outraged, and/or discouraged person.
 - Live as a faithful follower of Jesus – believe his Word & follow his commands even when it makes you an outsider.
 - If hatred is directed at you, praise God that you are worthy of being treated like Jesus.
 - Pray for the faithful witness of brothers and sisters facing severe persecution throughout the world (India, China, Muslim countries).

Close with video: *India – The True Picture of Persecution*